Krishna cult. In eastern India it is the Mother Goddess. Rama is very popular around the Arawali ranges of middle India and the south is divided primarily between the followers of Shiva and those of Vishnu

How has this amorphous entity, called Hinduism, survived for millenium? Is its very weakness of structure its enduring strength? There has been little proselytization: Hindus are just born so. In identifiable form it has been under continuous attack for centuries, by Muslims, Jains, Buddhists and Christians. However, it still thrives not only in India and to some extent in the West but news of it now comes from communist Russia as well.

Basically, the strength of the religion lies in its defence mechanisms rather than its capacity to overpower others. It is the strength in retreat and the strong loyalty it evokes in defeat that helps the Hindu to survive.

Hinduism is a way of ordering the world about and around the individual; the amorphousness of its beliefs and practices centre the religion in the individual himself rather than in an overbearing clergy or the tenets of faith.

Hinduism as compared to Islam or Christianity is more individually based and permits an easier process of evolution and involution. The evolutionary aspect of Hinduism can be demonstrated by the fact that sacred texts and *mantras* are even being coined today. The involutionary aspects of Hinduism can be shown by the change in the iconography of Shiva over the last fifty years. Fifty years ago Shiva has been shown moustached and pot-bellied. Today he is shown, clean shaven, in a Samson like muscular form and often blue in colour.

A few pictures of Shiva along with Parvati who [illegible] as [illegible] tionally shown in a trans[illegible] white saree can now be [illegible] with Parvati in [illegible] jewellery and attire. The capacity of Hinduism to undergo [illegible] gives it [illegible] resilience of form and content. The individual derives great [illegible] from his religion and also a freedom th[illegible] an [illegible] order [illegible] licentiousness. After enjoying all the freedoms that [illegible] atheist can enjoy from the bonds of religion, a Hindu can in times of distress fall back on his gods and the clergy for solace and strength.

There is little that an individual does that [illegible] permanently debar [illegible] from being a Hindu. What is properly speaking

Hinduism is equally difficult to define. What is described in this book is an overview, at a general level, of the practices and beliefs of Hindus. My thanks are due to Mr. Gupta for secretarial assistance. The line drawings are by Mr. Ishwar Chand and off course I must thank Subhadra.

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V.C. CHANNA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

PRINCIPLES OF DIVINITY

Hinduism, like a woman, has remained an enigma to thinkers and scholars. What has baffled them has posed no problems to the laity, living absorbed in its essence, practising it, not at all troubled by the scholastic debates going on around. Hindus follow their faith with a stoicism that perhaps helps to explain it better than any academic or philosophical debate.

What are the religious practices of the Hindus? For this, it must first be understood, that for a Hindu, religion and social activities are not easily separable. Both are closely tied up in the same on-going process of life.

In the morning, when shops and commercial establishments open, one sees an all too familiar sight of shopkeepers offering incense and lighting candles at their shutters and at small images or pictures of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, or the cash box itself. Office-goers, on their way to work, often pause before a wayside *bo*-tree, or anointed oval-shaped stone to offer a quick bow or *namaskar* and a short prayer. House-wives keep back a portion of the daily food to offer to the cow. Even in a busy metropolitan city, a Hindu does not have to take a day or some time off, to visit a shrine or set aside a special day for ritual. The office-clerk can pray while he does accounts and the house-wife while she cooks.

Divinity may lie just by the wayside; in alcoves, stones, or images, in corners of houses or even in the street animals. The nature of divinity in Hinduism is of a kind that is perhaps found in no other surviving religion. There is a plethora of gods and goddesses, and they come in such varying shapes and sizes that it could surely be incredulous or even laughable to a non-Hindu.

Much has been said about the sacred cow, but why only

the cow? A Hindu can see divinity in practically anything, anywhere : in rats, goats, dogs, stones, trees, rivers, flowers, animals; plants or objects, humble or majestic. Even the most educated and westernized Hindu will reverentially acknowledge the divinity of a stone or even an empty alcove in a wall.

In a Ganesh temple of Rajasthan, devotees carefully avoid stepping on any of the hundreds of crawling rats that occupy the floor and environs of the temple and are religiously fed by the devotees. If a votary accidentally steps over any of the 'divine' rats, he must compensate for the sin by replacing it with its image made of solid gold. Devotees of this temple include among others, the former Maharaja of Bikaner, Karni Singh, a highly educated, internationally reputed sportsman, an example of an emancipated upper class Hindu.

What, then, constitutes divinity in Hinduism? What makes a piece of stone divine? What makes one river equivalent to a goddess and another just ordinary? What is the great power of a picture, even as small as a thumb nail, that a man cannot start his day without bowing before it?

Although God's presence is found in everything, the real enigma remains: why should certain beings or forms be worthy of worship when others are not?

There are primarily four principles that form the basis for the object being more divine and consequently more sacred than another. These are :

1. dominance
2. continuity
3. growth or self-propagation
4. giving or altruism

Dominance is the principle of influence exerted, and the destructive power exercised by certain bodies and natural phenomena upon others, but more particularly upon human beings. This principle is the one by which ancient man in hot tropical countries looked up at the fierce sun overhead and bowed down to it, to worship it as the Sun-God. Not only is the Sun sacred to a Hindu but so is the Moon, with its power to cause waves to rise and fall in the oceans: and the vast oceans themselves, are regarded as gods. The mighty and snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas inaccessible yet capable of influencing man's life through snow, cold winds and bliz-

zards, the dominance of sheer size; all go to make these mountains a God.

Divinity is invested in natural elements. Fire, the mighty consumer; wind, the great demolisher; water, in the form of the big rivers, the powerful driver, are all invested with divinity.

Comparatively smaller rivers, placid lakes, ponds and small mountains are not so divine. For that matter, air is not worshipped in its elemental form but in the form of the wind, as Pawan, i.e. air in the form of strong currents. Fire, of which even the smallest spark is capable of causing conflagaration, is worshipped in all dimensions, including the embers of the domestic hearth.

Amongst animals, the huge elephant, the largest of all terrestrial animals, capable of uprooting trees with its trunk, is a dominant figure. The same for the snake, comparatively small in size but deadly in its bite.

The second principle, viz, continuity, though independent in itself as a criterion of divinity, is often associated with the first. Most objects which are dominant, powerful and influential, are also perennial. The heavenly bodies—sun, moon, planets and natural phenomena such as wind, rain, fire, mountains, the rivers, oceans—are all perennial. The small rivers and ponds are not so worthy, as they are the ones that dry up in the dry seasons or at the time of drought.

Those things that have a shorter life-span, have lesser divinity than those that live longer. For example, between the lion and the elephant both of whom may be considered equal in terms of dominance or strength, the lion is considered less divine because it has a shorter life. Similarly, all trees are not worshipped. It is the trees like the *bo*-tree and the *peepal* tree (*ficus religiosa*) that stand for many a decade, if not a century or more.

The third principle of divinity measures sacredness on the scale of growth, regeneration or self-propagation. An inanimate object that grows by itself is miraculous, and is called *swayambhu*. In this category are self-growing ant-hills and stalagmites and stalactites in caves which are recognized as deities. The shrine of Amarnath in the Himalayas is a self-

growing stalagmite in ice, which rebuilds itself every winter and melts down in summer.

Ant-hills are often worshipped as *swayambhu* deities. Myths are woven around them. In one temple the principle deity is a *swayambhu* ant-hill. Legend states that once, in the same place, there was a stretch of land used by cowherds for grazing their cattle. A sage used to sit there and meditate before a *Sri Chakram* or small cartwheel. As part of their play, the boys would bury the sage in a pit, but he would re-emerge elsewhere. One day the sage did not reappear. The sage had, however, buried the *Sri Chakram* at a particular spot where, sometimes later, an ant-hill came up. The sage had attained *samadhi*.

The boys continued to play as usual. One day their ball hit the ant-hill and blood began to ooze from it. A diviner was called to explain the strange occurrance. He revealed the presence of a powerful goddess in the ant-hill. The ant-hill was taken as the image of the goddess and a temple was erected around it. It is said that the ant-hill continues to grow and is now some twenty feet tall.

Apart from such *swayambhu* objects, other living beings associated with prolific growth and endurance are also considered divine. Among the plants, for example, the *tulsi* is holy; very hardy, capable of growing under the most adverse conditions, with a prolific spread and profuse flowering. Every home has a tulsi plant and to offer water to it, is a daily ritual for a housewife. Similarly, the banana tree, capable as it is, of prolific and effortless growth, without much attention and tending, is an object of worship. The divinity of the lowly rat may be traced to its capacity for rapid multiplication as every harrassed housewife, to her experience, knows.

Apart from the above three principles, there exists a fourth and the most important one, based upon the fact that the giver is superior to the receiver. Anything or anyone which gives more and receives less is holier than the one which is at the receiving end. For instance, the cow is holy; it gives milk and butter, the very basis of nourishment of the human body, especially so in a predominantly vegetarian country. Its dung is used for fuel and for plastering of mud walls, and its urine is used for therapeutic purposes.

The sun or *Surya* is sacred, it perennially gives heat and light; its movements are responsible for the cycle of seasons and each new season brings a delightful change of fruit and vegetables. The *Chandrama devta* (moon) also gives light. In a hot country, it is associated with the blissful relief of cool nights.

After a day's work under the blistering sun, a certain amount of play, fun and singing under the moonlit sky, brings great relief. The moon is thus also referred to as *Chanda Mama* (moon, the maternal uncle); it is a relationship involving fun, play and love. The phases of the moon provide man with the basis for making calender, enabling him to count days and keep track of the passage of time. The earth which yields all its bounties and does not ask for anything in return, is a mother goddess.

The holiness of human beings is also largely determined by this last-named principle. A religious mendicant, a *Sadhu* (saint) is a man who takes the least from society and gives maximum. A homeless *sadhu*, wandering naked and barefoot, has no worldly possessions, no relatives, neither wife nor children. He dispenses wisdom and blessings to the people and is considered holy, a man worthy of worship. Any man who seeks to possess material things, is removed from holiness, and the one who renounces them is considered divine. Gandhi is worshipped as divine and is referred to as the *Mahatma* (great soul). He lived the life of a renunciate but was perceived as giving freedom to his people. It was the greatest gift that could be given. He was, therefore regarded, not merely a political figure but a holy man, a *mahatma*.

The reasons for such a view of divinity lie in the most primeval problems faced by man; the problem of existence, of reproduction, of life and of death. Man's life is put into jeopardy by various forces. These include a scorching sun, fierce animals, flooding rivers, uncertain rains, barrenness of women, infant mortality, disease and famine, all of which are beyond his control. Uncertainties and vagaries of nature which dominated man's life as floods, cyclones, drought and epidemics, are still recurrent; they take away many lives and destroy much property.

Nevertheless, man's life has its bounties and pleasures. The rivers in spate bring misery and floods but they are an important source of water, the very basis of life. It takes much labour to till the earth, but it yields crops and medicinal herbs. The cow has to be fed and looked after, but it gives milk, and its dung is used as the much needed fuel for the domestic hearth. Hence divinity has a dual quality. It gives and it takes, but only to give more in turn.

In face of such uncertainties, any display of the power of creation and of survival is miraculous. Anything that grows by itself, has a great power of persistence, has a long life and is capable of multiplying rapidly, must be having a power within it. This power is worthy of worship; it is divine by itself. This power can be given a material form, just as every material thing can be understood in terms of its power components. Power and the material form, in which it is manifest, are two sides of the same coin.

Man would like to live long, if not for ever. He would like to have many children. He would like them to survive and have long lives. He would like his society, his relationships, his creations to multiply and to persist. Alas! given the heavy odds against him, there is little of man that survives. For succour man attaches himself to divinity.

Given the fact that man by his worship of divinity manages to forge an association with it, the question remains: What does man get from it? Worship involves much privation. It may take the form of fasting, rigourous prayers or long periods of meditation. The expense involved is of time and may be of money as well. Taboos of purity and pollution have to be observed. Elemental drives have to be suppressed. To what purpose are all the trials and pains?

There is always the last blessing of Pandoras box—hope. If in death there is a hope of rebirth; then there is much hope for man's many economic and social problems also. Perhaps, it is this fact, more than anything else, which makes man look towards divinity and its manifestations—on which he can pin his hopes in forms which, unlike his own weak self, are dominant, creative, perennial and giving.

There is much variation in the way the principles are manifested in material forms. There are many sources from which the basis of the forms are drawn. From his own infancy man draws out most dominant and beneficial figures of his experiences. These figures control him and bind him but, all the same, are indispensible for his survival. In these are included his father and his mother. Further, from his lost childhood man recaptures the dreams of missed plays and enjoyment, of love and frolic. Other sources for the material forms are the relations which are the source of anxieties, uncertainties and wants of his adult life. Powerful desires and emotions are made into various dieties and manifestations of divinity. The complexity and diversification of the sources of the divine forms lead to the situation where the system of gods is just as complex as social life. An appraisal of these various forms is the best guide to understanding Hinduism.

The four principles of divinity, although distinct in themselves are nevertheless joined by a single thread; that of origin or creation and continuity through time; the power of regeneration, rejuvenation and endurance; the power of growth and multiplication; and power to give and support material existance. This is what is called the life force. Thus the life force is the creative and sustaining energy. It is the *raison d'etre* of anything that exists in a material form. All material things are to be looked at from the point of view of what created them and how they are sustained? Thus, behind all continuity, eternality, regeneration and recreation of material things, there is a force of creation and sustainance. Material phenomena or forms are to be understood in terms of this force by which they may be characterized. Material forms and existence are not so important in themselves. What is important is the life-force behind material existence which is indestructible. Conversely, all powers can be given material forms.

That is why to a Hindu, there is no beginning and no end. Time is cyclical, life is cyclical, the whole universe is cyclical, never ending, never dying. It is a never ending process of creation in which there is no apocalypse but only recycling.

Chapter Two

MANIFESTATIONS OF DIVINITY

At the apex of the system of representations of divinity are the gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, also called the Hindu trinity. They combine in themselves the powers of creation, preservation and destruction. The combination of the three gods is the ultimate existence (or non-existence), the state of supreme bliss, of null and void. It is represented by the verbal symbol "Om". This Supreme Being, by its very abstraction and philosophical connotation is of little significance to the practice of Hinduism. It is not an object of worship. It provides a symbolic representation for Hinduism in general, and when written on something, it marks it, as of the highest sacred character.

BRAHMA

The god nearest to the supreme symbol, is Brahma. He is of no great relevance in the practices of the laity. Like the symbol "Om", Brahma too is a manifestation of a complete cycle; the origin and end of the universe. He is regarded as the Creator of the cycle of events that constitute the universe, and as such has no direct bearing on the personal lives of individuals. He is the creator of the abstract principles by which the universe operates. These principles are already set and unchanging. Therefore, they are inaccessible and uncontrollable. This is perhaps the reason why he is rarely represented as a deity—and rarely worshipped.

On the rare occasions in which Brahma is personified, he is showed as a wise old man with a blowing beard, four heads and four hands. In one hand he holds a conch shell and in another, the rosary.

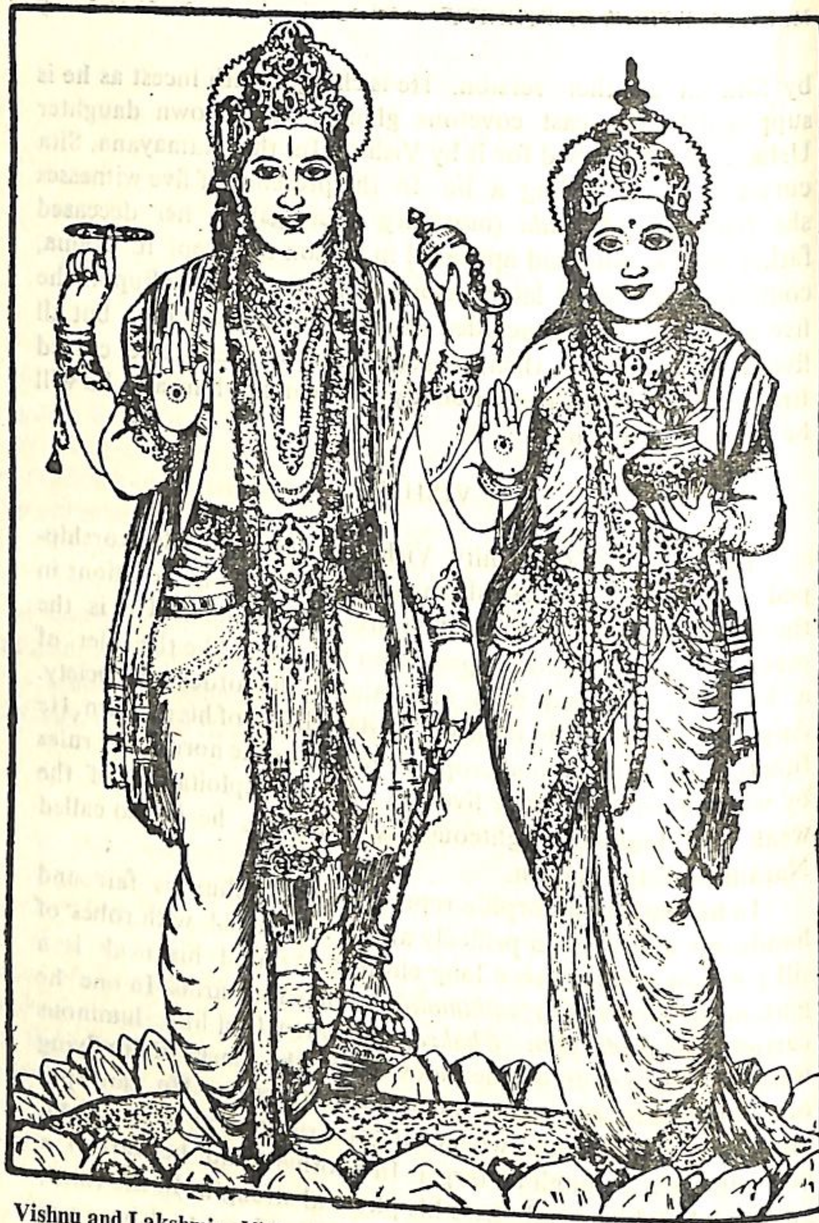
The reasons given for his non-worship by the people, relate to myths in which he is cursed by Vishnu in one version, and

by Sita in another version. He is charged with incest as he is supposed to have cast covetous glances at his own daughter Usha, and was cursed for it by Vishnu. In the Ramayana, Sita curses him for telling a lie. In the presence of five witnesses she had offered *pinda* (mortuary offerings) to her deceased father-in-law, who had appeared in person to accept it. Rama, coming on the scene later, disbelieved her. Sita called upon the five witnesses, which included Brahma, to support her, but all five backed out. She, then, cursed all five of them. She cursed Brahma that in *Kalyug* a nobody will worship him and he will be ignored as a deity.

VISHNU

The second of the trinity, Vishnu, is not popularly worshipped in himself. His earthly manifestations, his incarnations in the form of Rama and Krishna are very popular. He is the preserver and protector of people on the earth, like the ruler of a kingdom, charged with maintaining the order of society. Anything that disturbs the order of daily life is of his concern. He functions to ensure good crops, to maintain the norms and rules by which men order their lives, to prevent exploitation of the weak and maintain righteousness. As such, he is also called Narain or Satya Narain.

In his anthropomorphic representation Vishnu is fair and handsome and wears a princely attire, bejewelled, with robes of silky yellow or blue green long clothes. Around his neck is a garland of flowers (*Vyjanthimala*). He has four arms. In one he carries the *Sudarshan Chakra*, a cart-wheel-like luminous weapon. When spun on the index finger, the sparks of fire flying out from its rim can cause alround destruction. He can spin and throw this weapon, whence it goes, rotating at great speed, and cuts right through its target. In another hand he carries a *gada* (club) which symbolises his physical strength. In the third, he carries a conch shell which is usually blown to drive away evil. The fourth hand is raised, flat palm showing, a gesture by which he blesses and grants peace and prosperity. In this hand he may be shown to carry a lotus flower, the symbol of peace and beauty.



Vishnu and Lakshmi—Vishnu and Lakshmi are standing on a lotus, Vishnu has four arms. His one hand is raised with the palm forward, in blessing; another hand is carrying a *gada* (mace). The hand at the back on the left is carrying a *Sudarshan Chakra* while the hand at the back on the right, has a conch shell. Lakshmi holds in one hand *akalash* (metal pitcher of brass or bronze with mouth decorated with leaves) which is a symbol of prosperity; her other hand is raised in blessing,

A popular depiction of Vishnu shows him reclining on a lotus or sitting on his *vahana* the *garud* bird, a fictitious heavenly bird which is sometimes identified as a white eagle. On his chest is the *Kaustav Mani*, a most precious jewel that came out of the churning of the occean, and from his navel emerges a lotus flower on which Brahma is seated. His hands are occupied with the lotus, *chakra*, club and conch shell. The seven—headed Shesh Nag, the serpent on whom the earth rests, spreads his hood to form a canopy over him. Lakshmi is sitting towards his feet. Muni Narad stands by his head. Tungru *gandharva*, a celestial musician, is also in attendance.

Vishnu is also seen in a round smooth black stone called Salagram.

SHIVA

The third of the trinity, Shiva is the most popular in terms of worship. He is most often worshipped in the form of the Lingam. In fact, hardly any place of worship exists in which a Shiva Lingam is not present. Of all divine manifestations, it is the Lingam that is truely representative of the life force, the pair of regeneration and reproduction force. The very shape of the Lingam is like a lump of clay on the potter's wheel before it is turned and given shape. It is representative of the *akar* or basic life form, before its various bodily parts, arms and legs are developed. It represents nascent life, a stage in the cycle of life and death.

Shiva has charge of the three major problems that a man faces as he walks the path of righteousness, attempting to accumulate merit in order to go to heaven or escape from the cycle of transmigration.

A man must live a full life so as to have time to perform meritorious deeds. Any unnatural death cuts short the opportunity and prevents a man from ascending the heavens. Of accidental deaths, the two most common types are death by drowning and death by snake bite. Shiva controls both the rivers and the snakes.

A man must be mentally free to perform rituals, worship or meditate; and anything that might disturb his mind is in control of Shiva. In myths and legends, rishis and munis are often

disturbed in their prayers by demons and evil spirits. Shiva controls them. He holds in his power the ghosts, witches, the freaks, the dwarfs, mishappens, the thieves and robbers. All that is ugly and anti-social is under Shiva's control.

The last rites of man are to be performed by his son so that he may go to heaven. Shiva controls the forces that endow fertility, the energy by which humans beget children.

Shiva is worshipped not just as a Lingam but as an anthropomorphic being as well. Here he is like a father figure to man, embodying his primal hopes and fears. He controls the most powerful desires that drive man, such as sex and intoxication. He is the source of life and protects it from dark forces and mishaps. He guards man against his own wantonness for he advocates a life according to *niyam*, i.e. regulation, order or rules.

Shiva is truly a highly complex and multidimensional god. His Lingam and anthropomorphic figure contain and are surrounded by a host of symbols which appropriately link him to his many dimensions. Basically, the Lingam consists of two parts: A *pinda*, an oval-shaped stone, white, brown, or black, that rests on a leaf shaped base that is white or black in colour.

In one way, the contours of the Lingam are like the first dole of a potter's clay to be moulded into any shape. The bottom part is like a container. The formlessness of the *pinda* is representative of all life forms, before they take on their individual form and identity. It is therefore neither male nor female. Life and death are both represented in the Lingam. Both have a common source. Life implies death and vice-versa. Life and death are part of a cyclical process, and one leads to the other. The *pinda* is an intermediate stage between life and death. Shiva has charge of the process of life and death, he is creator as well as destroyer.

The Lingam is also a phallic symbol, the *pinda*, being the phallus and the base being the vagina or *yoni*. It represents the procreative power of the universe. The combination is one of Shiva as the *pinda* and Parvati as the base. The two represent, the male and female aspects respectively of creating life; the driving force or *shakti* behind all creation.

The Lingam is thus thought of as having a 'hot' quality. It is associated with cold quality objects. Three lines in sandalwood decorate the *pinda* and sometimes, in pictures, the crescent moon

is placed on it. A container of water is placed above it and water continuously leaks on to the Lingam, through a hole in its bottom. On special occasions the container contains milk instead of water. Several king cobras are coiled around the Lingam. These reptiles are also considered as cold.

The Shiva Lingam is usually a part of a pentagonal short walled area, in which there are other divine beings. This imagery is called the family of Shiva. It contains the images of (1) Bhagwati or Mother Goddess, identified as Parvati, (2) Kartikeya (3) Brahma, (4) Ganesh and (5) Nandi, the bull. Kartikeya and Ganesh are the sons of Parvati.

In pictures the anthropomorphic Shiva is depicted either as clean shaven or moustachioed, pot-bellied or muscular man, sitting in meditation in the *padmasan* posture, cross-legged, one palm raised in a gesture of blessing while the other is on an armrest. He has long, blowing hairs dropping on his shoulders, some of which have been collected in a bun on top of his head. On his forehead there are three horizontal lines and, occasionally, in the centre of the forehead is his third eye with the power to burn up just anything that it is set upon.

Now a days, it is becoming uncommon, but earlier he used to wear earrings. He wears a loin cloth of tiger skin and sits on one. Strings of beads of *rudraksh* adorn his wrists, upper arm, and his neck. He has a king cobra coiled around his neck, a crescent moon decorates his hair bun and the river Ganges flows out of the hair.

In the foreground, is a gourd container. Holy men carry water in it. The water from it they sprinkle to confirm that whatever they have said, granting a boon or cursing someone, comes true. By his side, stuck into the ground is his weapon which was, some fifty years ago, the battle axe, but today it is invariable the *trishul*, a three pointed spear. On this is strung a garland of flowers and a *damroo*, rattle drum. The rattle drum is played by those who train monkeys and bears. The white bull Nandi is also sitting or standing around.

In the background, just behind him, are flower-bearing vines. In the distance, there are snow-capped mountains. A river may also be flowing by. A full moon may be shown in the sky, if a crescent moon does not decorate his hair.

Mother Parvati often accompanies her Lord Shiva. She is

fair and lovely, draped in a single long cloth, white and translus-cent, showing much of her beautiful figure. Now-a-days, she is more often shown in bridal attire, standing by Shiva like in a wedding photograph while her ascetic lord meditates.

The associations of the anthropomorphic Shiva are many an object, known for cold quality or nature. As Shiva is the lord of fertility and procreation, which is considered a 'hot' process, these objects balance it out. These objects are the snow-capped mountains and river in the background; the full moon in the sky or the crescent moon decorating his hair; the river Ganges flowing from his hair; the (cold) reptile, the king cobra; the (dead) tiger skin which he wears as a loin cloth and on which he also sits.

Another dimension of Shiva is his likeness to a father. As the river Ganges flows out of his head, he is the source of life, like a father. Around his neck is the king cobra, a snake that keeps guard over a precious jewel called *mani* in the same way as a father sits over the family wealth. He has swallowed the deadly poison *halahal* obtained from the churning of the oceans. This poison, he has kept in his throat. It is for this, that his skin colour turned blue, and he is also called *Neelkanth*, the one with the blue throat. Thus, like a father to his family, he took upon himself the misfortune that might befall on others.

Shiva controls the most powerful motivations, such as sex and intoxication, aggression, much like the control of a father. A father protects and so does Shiva. He is the *yogi*, meditating amongst the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. This symbolises the distance or aloofness of the stern father in a traditional Hindu family, dreaded in childhood as the dispenser of punishment. The authority and sterness of Shiva is enhanced by his third eye, the *Agni-Netre*.

If a father is distant he is also close, and Shiva is showed surrounded by flower-bearing vines. A father, when pleased, is also beneficient; he blesses and he gives. Shiva is amongst the easiest to please among the deities. He is reputed to grant wishes easily. His ascetic appearal symbolizes a self-sacrificing parent who gives more and takes little from his offspring. The crescent moon on his forehead is a source of light in darkness, like a father to his child, guiding him at every step.

Shiva's representation is complete with his *vahana* or

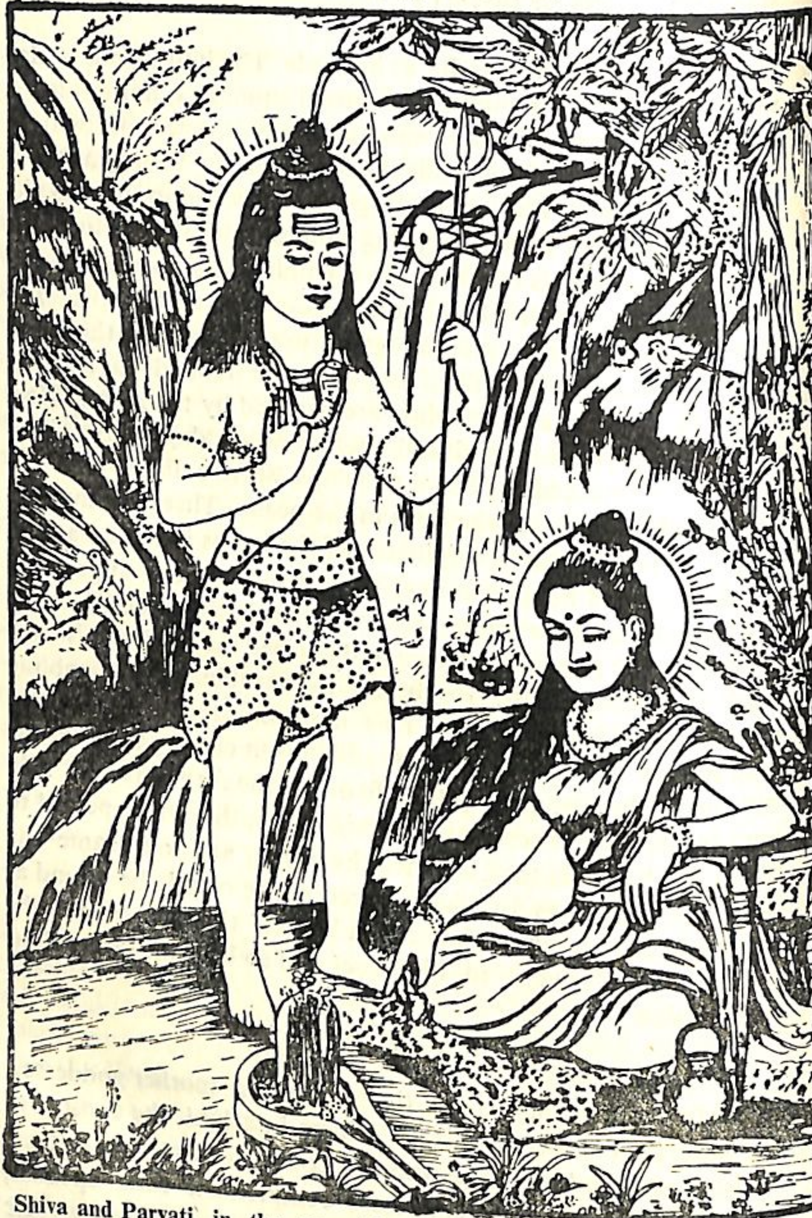
transport, the bull Nandi, at his side. The bull Nandi is also worshipped. It is an animal with broad shoulders, horns and a hump. The broad shoulders and hump give it power of traction. They pull the plough that tills the fields. In its iconography it may be showed with extra large testicles and in this case its capacity to father many offspring comes into the picture. Its progeny, the cow, is important to a Hindu in its own right.

Agricultural activities are often associated with Shiva. The bull is an important animal in agricultural operations, the moon too is associated with Shiva, and both are related to fertility. Days of sowing and reaping are counted by the moon. Most important days for agricultural operations are days of the ritual calender earmarked for Shiva worships. Shiva's links with the moon relate him to the tides in the ocean. There is a myth in which he is depicted as originator of the waves in the ocean.

Once when Shiva was near the sea-shore, there appeared a beautiful woman, to whom Shiva was physically attracted. God's attraction for this earthly woman disturbed the tortise on whose back the oceans rest. He began to tremble. His trembling caused waves in the ocean. This new movement in the seas resulted in all the debris, dirt, and poison coming up from the bottom of the sea, putting the life of marine forms such as fish, etc. in danger. Faced with certain death, they all appealed to Shiva for help. He then churned the ocean, and out came the deadliest of poisons for which no receptacle could be found as it would dissolve everything. Shiva himself then swallowed the poison. He placed it in his throat and so his own skin colour turned blue.

PARVATI

After the trinity come their consorts; mother goddesses; Parvati, the consort of Shiva; Goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu; and Goddess Saraswati, the consort of Brahma. In their characteristics the three goddesses complement their spouses; providing the female counterpart of all that is manifest in their husbands. Their importance is in the same order as of their consorts; the most sought-after deity being the mother goddess Parvati, wife of Shiva. She possesses all the attributes of the mother, specifically as a sexual partner to her husband. Her image reflects calm, beauty and simplicity. She is most often



Shiva and Parvati in the mountains—The river Ganges is sprouting from Shiva's head. His forehead is marked by three horizontal lines. Shiva has a cobra round his neck and wears a loin cloth of leopard skin, In his hand, on the right, Shiva, carries a *trishul* with a *damroo* (rattle drum)attached with it. His other hand is raised in blessing. Parvati is sitting on the ground on (an *asana* of) leopard skin. She wears a garland of flowers and her hands are in repose. There is a *karmandal* near her. There is a Lingam just in front of Paravati and ivys, trees and waterfalls are in the background.

showed as dressed in a simple white transluscent white cloth. Her part is that of marriage and the bearing of children. Just as she got Shiva to be her husband and like the mother in real life, who would like to see her daughters married well, she is prayed to, for a good husband and to beget children.

A mother is multifaceted, as every child knows. She assumes different forms and different moods, quite baffling. A mother can never be completely understood in just one form, so the Mother Goddess also takes on many forms, ranging from the innocent, pure Uma, (daughter of Himalaya) who prayed for Shiva to be her husband; Parvati, the simple wife of Shiva; the powerful Mother Goddess, Durga; to the raging and ferocious martial forms of Kali and Chandi. In her benevolent forms she is fair and extremely beautiful, and in her destructive forms black and fearsome.

She takes on all the diverse appearances of the female species—beauty, ugliness, fairness, darkness, rage and love, malevolence and purity. She is religious and sacrilegious, destructive and protective. She represents *Shakti*, the active power or energy of all that has a material existence in this universe. She is the source of life, the female reproductive power and the regenerative or renewal force of this universe.

DURGA

The most popular form of the Mother Goddess, worshipped alone by herself is, Durga. Durga is a deity complete in herself, that is without her consort. She is the complete representation of all forms and forces that work against evil and promote well-being in the universe.

According to a myth, once when the entire creation was reeling under the tyranny of evil forces, all men and gods alike, appealed to Brahma for deliverance from the demons. Brahma then created a mother goddess from Parvati, who appeared to be of surpassing beauty and full of power. She was armed by all the gods, who each gave her a bit of their own power and weapon. Vishnu gave her his famous *sudarshan chakra*, Shiva gave her his *trishul*, and so on. In her representation she is showed as beautiful, golden hued with streaming black hair, bejewelled and wearing a bright red saree. She is showed riding



Durga riding a tiger—She wears a crown and has eight hands. The front hand on the left side is raised in blessing and the front hand on the right side carries a conch shell. The three hands on the left side have a sword, *trishul* and *sudarshan chakra*. The three hands on the right side carry the scythe, mace or club and lotus flower. In the background towards the top are four brass bells. The mark of *om* adorns the raised palm of Durga.

either a tiger or a loin and has ten arms each carrying a weapon. She is worshipped for everything, especially for warding off disaster, success in war and begetting a child.

KALI

The counterpart of Durga is Kali, the Mother Goddess in her most blood-thirsty form. Whereas Durga represents the benevolent forces and power, Kali is the representative of evil and dark forces. Robbers, dacoits and outlaws always worship Kali for success in their expeditions. True to her character, she appears jet black in colour, naked, adorned by a garland of human skulls. Her eyes are large and luminous with a blood-thirsty expression in them, her facial features have a deadly beauty, framed as they are in her abundant open dark hair. Her tongue lolls out as if to devour. A naked sword, blood dripping from it, is held in one of her four outstretched arms. In one representation, her feet rest on the chest of her husband Shiva, a figure of supreme defiance. Her entire presence is of an awesome beauty, representative of the darkest recesses of the female psyche.

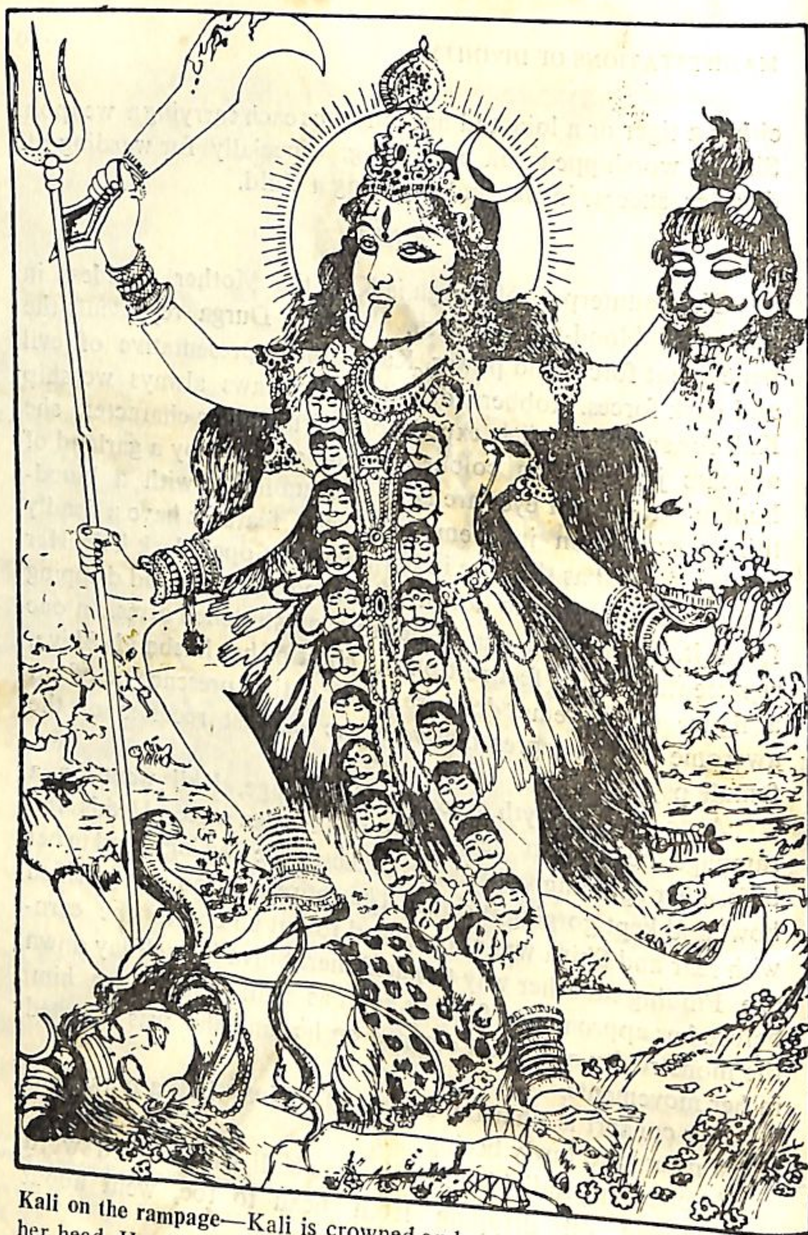
According to myth, once in a fit of rage, Kali went on a rampage bent upon destroying the human race. Heads fell before her spinning sword. She collected the flowing blood in her bowl and kept gorging it down. The entire creation was petrified with fear and Shiva was approached to put an end to the carnage. Finding no other way to pacify her. Shiva himself lay down before her approaching feet. As soon as Kali stepped on him, the monstrocity of her act dawned on her and she was arrested in her movements.

Her consort is Bhairon, a form of Shiva, but a much darker; a mean and lowly beeing.

At one time, individuals dressed as Kali, with a naked sword in hand and oil dripping from head to toe, went about demanding alms.

LAKSHMI

After Parvati comes Lakshmi—the consort of Vishnu. Appropriately, as a complement to Vishnu, the protocol preserver, she is the goddess of wealth and prosperity, or *maya*, the force that moves the world. For a ruler to be successful and



Kali on the rampage—Kali is crowned and a crescent moon also decorates her head. Her long long tresses are flowing. Her tounge is lolling out. She is bejewelled and also wears a garland of human heads and belt of seveved human hands. Kali has four arms. Her hands on the left side hold a *tri-shul* and a scythe-like sword on the right side, one hand holds a just severed head, blood from which is flowing into a cup held below in Kali's other hand. One of Kali's feet rests on the chest of Shiva. Shiva is lying on the ground a crescent moon decorates his bun and strings of *vudraks-ha* are his garlands. Cobras are entwined around his neck and body. He is wearing a loin cloth of leopard skin. One of Shiva's hands is flat on the ground, another has a *damroo*. In the background are shown corpses, skeletons and people running helter-skelter.



Saraswati, Lakshmi and Ganesh—Saraswati is crowned and is sitting on a lotus that rests on the back of a swan swimming in water. She holds a *veena* in two hands and two of her hands are free. Lakshmi is standing on a lotus that is resting on water. She is crowned and bejewelled and with flowing long hair. Two of her hands hold lotuses, one is raining coins and the other is with a partially raised palm in blessing. In the background, towards the top are flowering ivys and an elephant on either side is holding a garland in his trunk. In the foreground are the materials for worship and account books. Ganesha is crowned and bejewelled and is sitting on a throne. Of his four hands one is holding a rosary, another has a palm raised in blessing, a third holds *trishul* and the fourth is free.

benevolent his coffers must be full, his kingdom prosperous and his granaries overflowing. These are all symbolized in Lakshmi—wealth, prosperity and a flourishing homestead. She is also the ideal housewife, the one who maintains peace and prosperity in the household. The new daughter-in-law is referred to as the Lakshmi of the house, for she brings with her a promise that she may, through her thrift and good will, enhance the prosperity of the household and the well-being of its members.

SARASWATI

Saraswati is the wife and daughter of Brahma as once he had incestuous inclinations. She is Lakshmi's sister. Saraswati is the goddess of learning, wisdom and all the fine arts. She is prayed to for knowledge and wisdom.

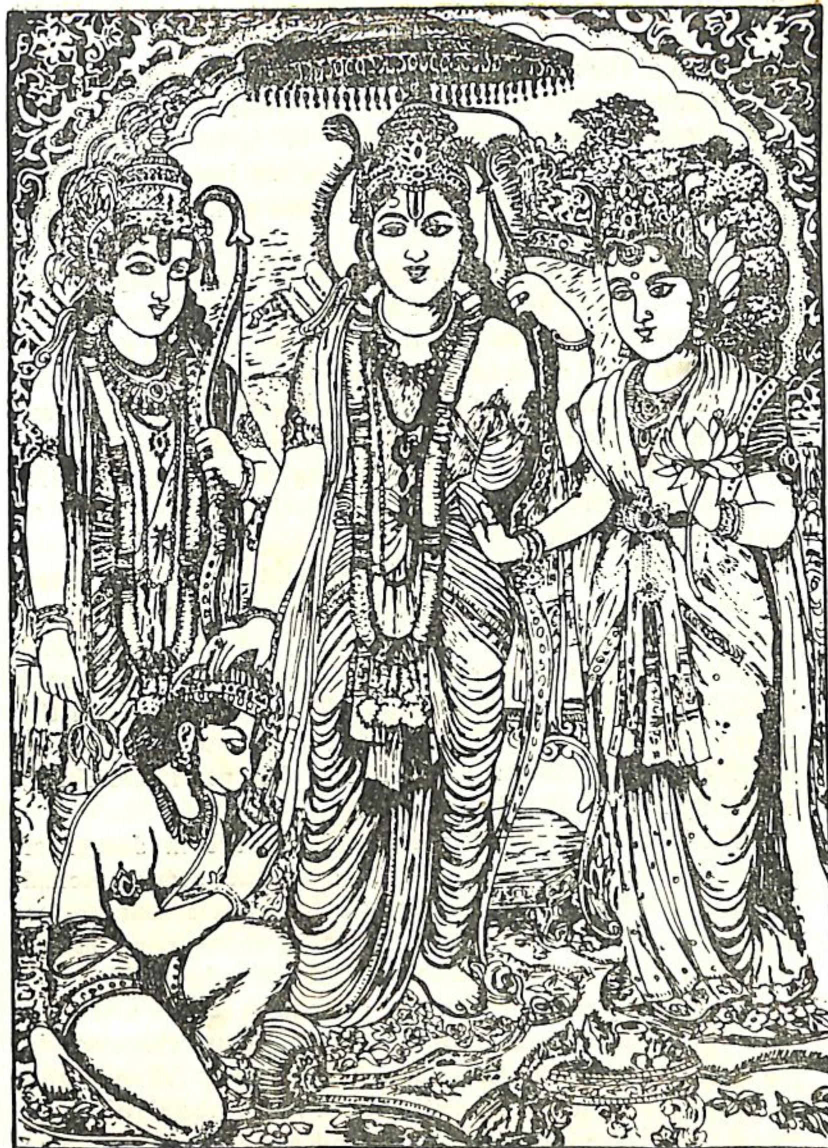
She is serene, dressed simply in white with a snow-white complexion, she carries a *veena* in one hand. She wears no jewellery except a garland of white flowers. Saraswati is unmarried and a virgin. Her *vahana* is the white peacock or a white swan.

As the sister of Lakshmi, it would be expected that she is somewhat like her. She is, on the contrary, her exact opposite. Unlike Lakshmi, Saraswati is difficult to cultivate but once a person has acquired her, she does not easily leave him. The two sisters are said to be mutually incompatible, meaning thereby that a person can have either wealth or learning, but not both. When a person is a talented singer or says things of knowledge and wisdom, Saraswati is said to reside in his/her tongue.

RAMA

The reincarnations of Vishnu on earth are directly an extension of the trinity. The most well-known and popularly worshipped are the last two incarnations of Vishnu, namely Rama and Krishna. They are *Yuga-avatars*, each appearing in one *Yuga*—Rama in the *Tretayuga* and Krishna in *Dwaparyuga*.

Rama respresents all the norms and ideals of a Hindu householder. His life, the Ramayana, is a projection of the ideals of adult life onto society. The very ideality of Rama is a



Lakshmana, Hanuman, Rama, Sita in Rama's Court—Lakshmana, crowned garlanded and bejewelled is standing holding a lotus flower in one hand and bow in the other. A quiver with bows is slung over his shoulder. Rama, crowned, garlanded and bejewelled is standing under a gilded canopy, with one hand resting on the head of Hanuman, blessing him, and the other hand is holding his bow that is slung over his shoulder. A quiver with bows is on the other shoulder. Sita crowned and bedecked is standing, holding a lotus flower in one hand with the palm of the other hand raised in blessing. Hanuman clad in some jewellery and a loin cloth is in sitting position; with folded hands he is paying obeisance to his Lords. His mace is by his side. The throne of Rama is just behind Rama.

resolution of the conflicts and anxiety that mortal men face in the actuality of their social relationships. It is for this reason that Rama is never conceptualized in isolation from the Ramayana. Rama and the Ramayana are inseparable. The necessity for the manifestation of Rama as a divinity is clear only though the Ramayana.

The ideal relationships brought out in the Ramayana via the deeds of Rama are those of a man with his father, mother, brother, wife and servant and that of a ruler with his people. A markedly ignored relationship is that of brother and sister. The reason for the exclusion of this relationship is enough to throw light on the inclusion of the others. This relationship differs from other familial relationships as being one that, in real life, most closely approaches ideality. It is a relationship devoid of tension and anxiety.

As a child, a boy learns to cherish and respect his sister, as having a sacred status, and this relationship continues for their whole life. Once the sister goes away to her own affinal household, the bond between the two remains that of a shared childhood and remembered affection. The relationship is all the more poignant because, in traditional society, a woman after her marriage was almost totally cut off from her natal household, especially if it was in a far off place.

The Ramayana, depicts relationship that are in danger of passing through phases of conflict and estrangement. Actual patterns of behaviour, often contradict the ideals that are so meticulously cherished. The conflicts in these relationships are partly due to the contradictions inherent in family ideals.

In the beginning of his life, a son must remain under the authority of his father and respect his decisions. However, in the father's old age, in the instance of the latter's failing health and diminished mental capacities, there is a reversal of roles. The father becomes increasingly dependent on the son in matters of earning a livlihood and running of the household. This process is a very painful one, both for the father and the son. Between brothers there is unequal authority in terms of age but equal share in property. In such situations conflicts among brothers and between father and son are inevitable.

A man marries a woman who is a complete stranger and, through the expression of his and his mother's authority,

attempts to mould her in the lifeways of his household. In later life she is supposed to be completely united with her husband, an ideal that is rarely achieved. Again, husband and wife relations are strained by the demands of the mother on the son. The mother-son bond is harmonious, till the entry of the son's wife, when much conflict arises, as rights and duties clash. Even the relationships between master and servants in day-to-day life are filled with disloyalties and mutual distrust. The ideals of society need reinforcement in the background of the reality of the social situation. To keep the honour of his father, Rama willingly went into exile, accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana. The faithful brother Bharata kept the throne of Ayodhya in safe-keeping for his brother.

Rama displays the virtue of an ideal son by respecting the wishes of his father, however, unreasonable. In his exploits in the jungle and later in his martial strategies against Ravana, he displays the caste virtues of a Kshatriya, namely valour and strength. In the love and care that he showers on his wife in the jungles and later by waging a war in her honour, he displays the idealities of a husband. In his magnanisms and tactful dealings with Sugreev and Hanuman and the troops of monkeys he displays the idealities of a master, and lastly as the ruler of Ayodhya he is the ideal ruler, as milk and honey flow in the rivers of his kingdom. His adherence to truth and ideality is further emphasized by his agreement to putting Sita on the burning pyre to test her fidelity.

Sita demonstrates her ideality as a wife by denouncing the pleasures of the palace to follow her husband into the hardships of the jungles. She scrupulously keeps her virtue despite pressures from Ravana. She obeys her husband even to the extent of ascending the burning pyre.

Lakshman and Bharat each depicts the ideal behaviour of a younger brother. The former does so by following his elder brother into exile, leaving a young wife behind and foresaking all the luxuries of the palace.

The war between Rama and Ravana further crystallizes the forces of good and evil, resulting in the triumph of good over evil. So the Ramayana emphasizes the ideal that good wins over evil and righteousness leads to happiness. The guilty, however highly placed, will be punished.

In his appearance, Rama is shown in silken attire adorned with jewellery appropriate to a king, a crown on his head and a bow in his hand. His skin is either fair or bluish in colour. He has elongated eyes and beautiful features framed by shoulder length, curly hair. His wife Sita is always shown by his side, dressed like a queen, beautiful, bejewelled, with a cornet on her head. However, there is another popular, pictographic image of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, though this is never shown in idols. They are shown as they appear in the jungle, with matted hair, no jewels and wearing the bark of trees. Here, Rama and Lakshmana carry bows on their shoulders and quivers full of arrows at their back.

KRISHNA

Krishna, the other most popular incarnation of Vishnu, brings out an entirely different aspect of human emotions. Whereas, Rama is representative of the ideals, norms, rules and regulations of society, Krishna is the messenger of love and devotion. He manifests in childhood the virtues of breaking all rules and barriers of society. He advocates attachment with the supreme deity through the path of love and abandon rather than the rigidity of the path of righteous action. It is significant that Krishna-worship in the form of the *bhakti* movement swept India just when the rule by priests and Brahmins had become most oppressive. The movement was directed against normaline rituals.

Krishna is worshipped in two different forms—the child, a cowhered and lover of Radha, and the adult, a king and preacher of the Gita. The former is much more popular and attracts many devotees. Krishna's childhood recreates dreams of an ideal childhood missed by most but coveted by all. Here we see a picture of the most lovable child, naughty and prankish who is doing and eating what he likes, often stealing the coveted foodstuff. Culturally, in Hindu society, the desires of a child to eat and play freely are severely curtailed especially so because of the parsimony practised in the household. Also, children are put to some kind of work from a very early age, cutting down on playing time. Krishna's play with the milkmaids or *gopies*; his teasing them and free interaction with the girls, is directly



Krishna—Krishna standing in front of a cow and calf is playing the flute, wearing a crown as well as peacock feather. On his forehead is the sign of Vishnu. In the background is a river and mountains. Cows standing on the bank of the river completes the picture of Krishna the cow herd.

opposed to the rigid restrictions, placed on the free intermingling of opposite sexes.

The strength and power of Krishna, even as a child, and his capacity to protect the community is quite opposed to the actual ineffectiveness of youth in a society ruled by gerontocracy. Sex in Hindu society is primarily associated with procreation; all expressions of romantic love and sex for enjoyment are frowned upon. Early, pre-puberty betrothals and arranged marriages are common. The cohabitation between husband and wife is a hurried and hush-hush affair due to joint family living and cramped living quarters. Krishna's flirtations with Radha—a married woman and several years his senior, their love plays transcending barriers of caste, is quite the reverse of what happens in society. The very fact of Radha being older than Krishna, i.e. sexually mature, is manifestation of the problems faced by most men in coping with child-brides.

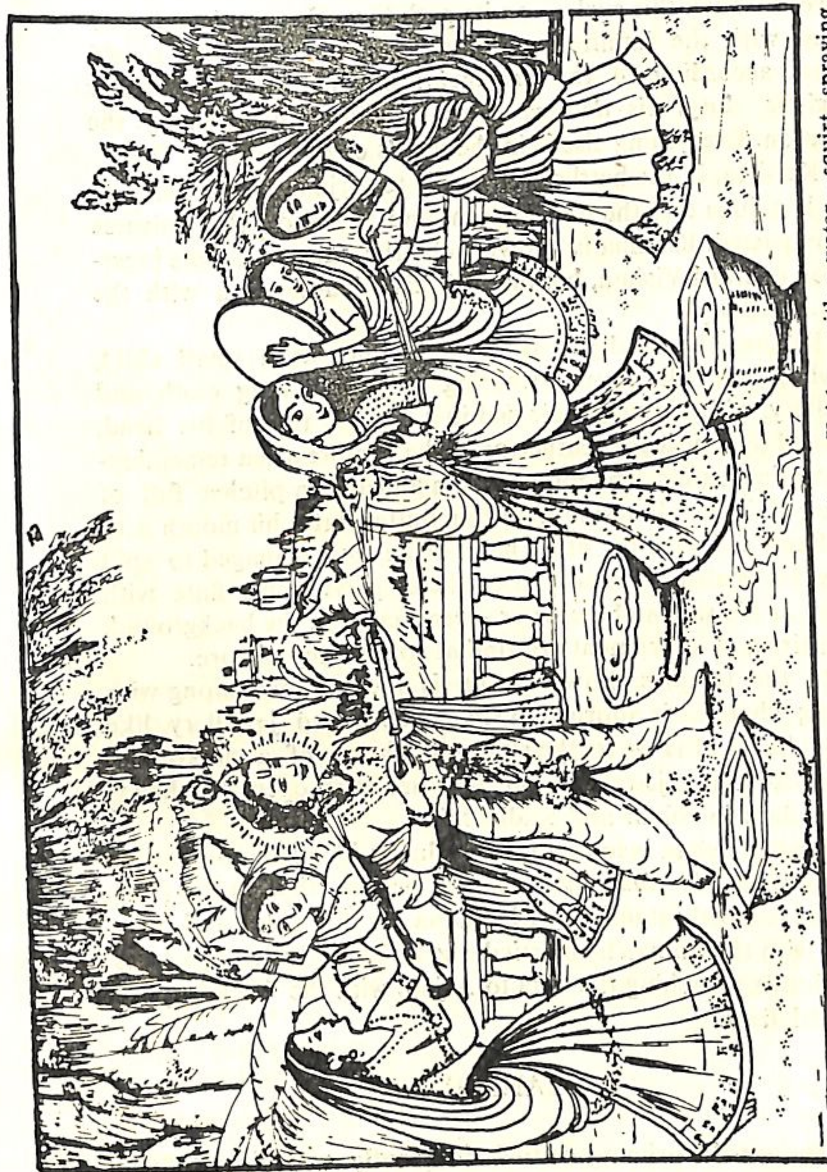
The child Krishna is the projection of the cultural repressions that man suffers in his early life. The love-life of Krishna, the so called *lila* of Radha and Krishna, expressing the sublime nature of love divorced from its biological base, are dreams of childhood and youth that rarely find an expression.

The adult Krishna, who rules as the king of Mathura is less an object of worship and more a popular hero of legends and myths, especially as a central figure in the epic Mahabharata.

In idols and pictures, Krishna is depicted either as an infant or along with Radha as a young boy, thus emphasizing the Krishna of the Radha-phase. Krishna himself is said to have granted Radha the boon that wherever he will be worshipped on earth, it will not be by himself, but as Radha-Krishna.

The adult Krishna or *Purushottam*, the most superior of men, is best worshipped through the readings of the Gita, the text of which he delivered to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

The Gita rises one above the level of society and its usual constraints. It is an exploration of the direct bond between the individual and the Supreme Deity. By putting forward the theory of the *atman* (soul) and its relation to divinity, it places man above society. The very situation in which the Gita was preached—the battlefield of Kurukshetra—is a negation of



Krishna doing Ras Leela with the gopies—The foreground shows Krishna with a water—squirt spraying Radhika with coloured water. On the ground, there are around them, vessels, filled with coloured water. The four other women are *gopies* (milk maids), friends of Radhika. Two of them are throwing colour water with water-squirts. Another is playing on a *dhapli* (a shallow single-headed drum) and one is dancing. In the background of this scene are trees and in the far background are houses of the city Brindavan.

social, orderly life. In the Gita, all events are deemed pre-ordained, forming part of the cycle of events. The soul or *atman* moves through this cycle—on its path towards complete assimilation with the infinite by doing *karma* or action that is self-willed, according to the exigencies of the situation. Man's religious duty, his *dharma* is to do *karma* dictated by the situation. Everything else is in the hands of the Supreme One.

Krishna, in the battlefield reveals to Arjuna his divinity in which Arjuna sees the past, present and future of the universe encompassed. Krishna is known to be the most complete incarnation of Lord Vishnu, because of his identification with the Supreme Deity.

Krishna-the-child-god is showed either as a small child, crawling on all fours, wearing a yellow long cloth and jewellery, with his curly hair tied in a bun on top of his head, adorned by a peacock feather or, as he is more often remembered, stealing butter. The image shows an earthen pitcher full of butter; Krishna alongside is putting butter into his mouth with one hand and with the other hand he has just managed to spill some. He is also depicted as a cowherd, playing his flute with Radha at his side and a cow or several cows in the background. His attire and adornment are similar to his baby picture.

In the temples, however, he is always shown along with Radha; where he is adorned in silken robes and jewellery like a king, but Radha wears the skirt and blouse of a milk-maid, along with ample jewellery; her hair are often open. Krishna is always dark in colour and Radha fair.

Adult Krishna inconography is almost identical to that of Vishnu with his *Sudarshan Chakra*, except that in this form Krishna is mostly standing with Radha, by his side, and very rarely with the woman he married, viz. Rukmini. In some pictures he is shown preaching the Gita to Arjun, with the backdrop of the battlefield.

GANESH

Amongst the primary deities, frequently worshipped first, comes Ganesh, the son of the divine couple, Shiva and Parvati. He has a portly figure with an elephant's head. The elephant is associated with strength, long life and powerful memory. This



Ganesh—Ganesh is sitting on a throne with a crown on his head. On the left side his one hand carries a battle axe and in the other one, he holds a piece of his own tusk. On the right side, one hand has a sceptre and in the other, there is plate of sweets. On his forehead is the mark of Shiva—three parallel lines—and the *trishul*. At the root of his trunk is the mark of '*om*'. He wears garlands round his neck. His wrist and ankles are ornamented. Near his feet is his *vahana*, the rat, eating a sweet.

deity represents the fundamental idea that although humans appear higher in the scale, men and animals do possess a similar character. Animals and humans form part of the same continuum. This is another expression of the fact that all souls pass through a cycle of birth and rebirth in various forms. These forms include all life, animals and human. In their fundamental content—that of the soul—all life is the same. The overt characteristics may differ.

Ganesh, the union of human body with an elephant's head, is the deified expression of these beliefs. He is a synthesis, expressive of the unity of all life. Ganesh symbolises the beginning of things when, from one fundamental material, differentiation into various forms occurs. That is why the worship of Ganesh precedes all other worship; one must begin at the beginning itself. Moreover, the elephant-headed god rides a mouse—thus unifying the useful with the useless, the big with the small.

Myths associated with Ganesh tell why he must be worshipped before any other rituals are performed or any important work is undertaken; a rule that has made the name "Sri Ganesh" synonymous with an auspicious start.

According to a myth, one day while Shiva was away, Parvati wanted to take a bath. She wanted someone to guard her chambers. So she rubbed some dirt off her body and made a small child. She told this child to guard the door of her bathroom and not to allow anyone inside.

While Parvati was still bathing, Shiva came back. He wanted to enter into Parvati's chambers but the child did not know who Shiva was, and so he steadfastly refused to let Shiva in. He said he could not disobey his mother's orders. Shiva, in a fit of rage, beheaded the child.

When Parvati came out, she found that her child had been slain by Shiva. She started weeping loudly, lamenting the loss of her child. Parvati's tears made Shiva repent. He consoled her by saying that he would make her dead child come alive. Shiva went out looking hither and thither till he found a she-elephant sleeping; her back towards her baby. Shiva immediately cut off the baby elephant's head along with a snake that was coiled around it. (For this reason mothers never sleep with their backs towards their infants.) He transplanted this head on the child's body. On seeing an elephant's head on her baby, Parvati cried

complained that her child was now hideous-looking. Shiva told her that even though her child had been disfigured, he would be honoured by one and all, and his worship will precede all other ritual.

There is another myth that explains the reason of the universal worship of Ganesh, before any other's. One day Shiva and Parvati were sitting with their sons, Kartikeya and Ganesh. Shiva laid a wager. He said to his sons, "Let us see which one of you comes back first, after taking a round of the world?" Kartikeya hurried off on his fast *vahana*, the peacock, and took a round of the world. On reaching his parents he found Ganesh already there. Ganesh had not set out on his *vahana*, the rat, to circle the world. He simply took a round of Shiva and Parvati, did *pranam* and sat down before them, saying that his world were his parents who embodied the whole universe and he had gone around them. Shiva and Paravti were greatly pleased with him, and Shiva gave Ganesh the boon that before undertaking any auspicious task, people would pray to him.

HANUMAN

There is one more non-human god. He is the monkey-god Hanuman. He is one of the most popular gods of the Hindu pantheon, showing that the highest divinity may be expressed in forms that are animal as well as human. For, in the animal world, there exist qualities which are the same as humans. In this case it is physical strength, morality and loyalty.

Hanuman the monkey-god cannot be understood apart from his role in the Ramayana where he is the devoted and loyal follower of Rama. His feats of strength in the service of Rama include crossing the ocean from India to Lanka in one jump; carrying a whole mountain on his hand and flying in the air; assuming forms as tiny as a fly to as huge as a mountain; and setting the entire city of Lanka on fire with his burning tail. His strength is derived from his father, the wind-god Pavana, his mother being the female langur Anjani.

According to myth, as related in the Ramayana, Anjani, in human form (she was a langur, otherwise) was standing alone near the river. The wind-god Pawan, passing by, was enamoured by her beauty. Anjani felt a strong gust of wind come and blow

her clothes away. Thus the energy of the wind had entered her and she conceived.

Hanuman is the epitome of loyalty. His devotion to Rama and Sita is unsurpassable. There is a story that he once tore open his chest, to display Rama and Sita enthroned therein. This is quite often shown in pictures. Hanuman is worshipped for health and for success in any venture. He is looked upon as a protector from evil forces, such as ghosts, evil spirits and disease; another name for him being *Sankat-Mochan*, i.e. the one who delivers from all troubles.

Hanuman looks a humanised monkey, with a monkey face and long tail, but a strong, muscular and sometimes hairless body that is almost human. He wears a loin cloth and his idols have silver leaves stuck on to them. His colour is organge ochre, and he may have a golden crown on his head and a *gada* (club) in his hand.

KARTIKEYA

Though there are, theoretically, some thirty million Hindu gods and goddesses, only a few are popularly known and recognized, and it is only such important deities as already mentioned that are worshipped. Some other deities are quite well-known and recognized, though not regularly or otherwise worshipped. Most of these deities are known through myths. Of them, we may mention the most well-recognized, Kartikeya.

Kartikeya is the elder son of Parvati and Shiva. When a complete family picture of Shiva and Parvati is shown, Kartikeya is always shown alongside Ganesh. He is the personification of beauty, and whenever anyone is praised for his good looks, he is compared to Kartikeya. He is not prayed to and does not have a temple, or idols of his installed therein. Beauty is an idle virtue, and hence the unimportance of Kartikeya as a deity. According to myth, once the residents of heavens, the *devtas*, had approached Shiva to protect them against the demons and Shiva had sent Kartikeya. In fighting the demons, Kartikeya was struck by a weapon that made him formless.

GRAHAS

Divinity is not confined only to gods and goddesses. It pervades natural objects both in the heavens and on the earth. The most potent and most influential objects that, in their capacity to influence, are next only to the higher deities, are the heavenly bodies, nearest to the earth. These are Surya (Sun), Chandrama (Moon), Mangal (Mars), Budh (Mercury), Shukra (Venus), Shani (Saturn), Brihaspati (Jupiter), and Rahu and Ketu. Quite clearly, the list includes the Sun and the Moon along with other planets of the solar system. The last two are fictitious bodies. Probably the ancient astrologers suspected the presence of two more planets but, unable to locate them, had given them the elusive character of Rahu and Ketu, one of whom is headless and the other bodyless. In terms of their astrological significance, they correspond to the two points of intersection formed by the crossing of the paths of the Sun and the Moon.

With the discovery of a new planet, little change has been made. For some years now, the clergy has combined the effect of Rahu and Ketu into one, viz. Rahu-Ketu, and have added one more, namely Paltoo (Plato).

It is on the basis of the movements of these heavenly bodies that the horoscope of an individual is prepared. The cosmic space around the individual is divided into 12 spaces or *ghar*, and the position of a heavenly body in a particular *ghar* has a specific effect on the life of a person. For the individual, this means that the distribution of the heavenly bodies at birth and their movement later on in the 12 spaces or *ghar* determine much of his later life.

Out of the heavenly bodies the Sun, the Moon and the Saturn are considered worthy of worship in their own right. Other heavenly bodies may be worshipped, if they have an adverse effect on the individual as divined from a reading of the horoscope.

The importance of the Sun and the Moon as deities and their divinity rests on the principles of dominance and giving. The divinity of Shani is related, more to the principle of dominance, because Saturn is supposedly the most powerful of the heavenly bodies, may be because of its size. It just domi-

nates, it varely gives, therefore it is divine but malevolent. Its potent ability to harm and bring misfortunes on individuals, inspires awe and reverence for the Shani Devta. Apart from the Sun, he alone, among the planets, is regularly worshipped.

The power or influence of the planets multiplies many times when they came in conjunction with each other. Each time such a conjunction has occurred, it has caused widespread panic and feverish ritual activities.

Similarly, at the incidence of an eclipse, potent forces are believed to be let loose. Changes in apparent physical conditions of the heavenly bodies such as the waxing and waning of the moon and the eclipses are taken to be real and similar to changes in the physical condition of the human body. The moon, for example, is worshipped on a full moon (*Purnamashi*) day when it is believed to be potent and complete. It is quite understandable then, that many people refused to believe that the Americans landed on the moon, stepped on it and even defiled it.

GODS OF DEVLOK

Human qualities of emotions, sensory feelings and basic biological needs of hunger and sex are attributed to lesser divine beings. In the deities of the upper echelons of divine heirarchy, such qualities are sublimated and acquire divine proportions. They are, by their magnanimous scale and magnificent nature, of an order different from mundane human feelings. Moreover, the emotions felt by the higher gods are usually of the sublime kind. As we move down the scale of divinity, the lesser gods and goddesses and supernatural beings acquire more and more human qualities. Baser emotions such as lust, greed, rivalry, jealousy, etc. also start making their appearance.

The affinity of the gods to human beings has also another dimension. In earlier times it was believed that the gods, including Shiva and Vishnu, often roamed about the earth in different human forms. There are many instances of myths where gods are shown to come down to the earth and take the guise of humans. In Kalyug such phenomenon is believed to be rare, for the sinfulness of humans has so disenchanted the gods that now they do not step down into the world.

Amongst the lesser gods and goddesses are those that occupy the heaven or *Dev Lok*. The king of heavens is Indra, also the god of the rains. He commands the rain and thunder, No anthropomorphic idol is made of him and neither is he regularly worshipped. He may be verbally remembered when there is excessive rain or no rain.

Agni *devta* is the fire god; he is the ultimate purifier and worshipped both for light as well as heat-giving properties. Fire is also associated with the spirit of sacrifice. Offerings are made to Agni in the form of ghee and ritual offerings, and all *Yajna* and *havan* consist of ritual offerings to the fire to the chanting of Vedic hymns. A Hindu marriage is performed with Agni as the sacred witness and the nuptials are solemnized with the couple going seven times round the fire. The dead can ascend to heaven only if the mortal remains are confined to the funeral pyre. Agni or fire is thus the purest of all elements, reverred and worshipped in its natural form. Even at the domestic hearth a ritual offering to Agni is made at the time of cooking of each meal. In a hot climate where things tend to putrify rapidly, fire remains the most efficient cleanser.

The perennial rivers, the source of social life as they sustain large populations, are considered like Mothers. The form of attachment to them is by way of worship, and by taking a bath in them. It is said that by bathing in the Ganges, the ritually most sacred river, one's past sins are all washed away. The bathing (complete identification) raises an individual's ritual status to that of the river. The individual comes out as a pure being.

The Earth is also conceptualized as a Mother, though no explicit form of worship exists. Yet it is common to show reverence to the earth by bending down and touching it and bringing the fingers to the forehead. The Earth is for men the source of food, water, shelter and in fact human existence, more directly so for a primarily agricultural communiry. The Earth like Fire is never personified but revered as such in its natural form.

Of the other numerous gods and goddessess, the one that is often referred to, even though not with any particular reverence, is the God of Love, Kamadev. When a person is in

love, he is said to be smitten by Kamadev. At one time, he was the most handsome of all gods. He once disturbed Shiva in his meditation and was reduced to ashes by the opening of Shiva's third eye. From then onwards he became formless. His wife is Rati and they are famous for their amourous love-making. Kamadev, in fact, was often employed by Indra in the mischevious task of disturbing holy men and gods and goddesses in their meditation.

The character of most of the minor *devis* and *devtas* are comparable to human beings in their mischievous tendencies and in their yielding to lesser emotions. Even Indra the king of the heavens is of a particularly lecherous nature—given to seducing women for pleasure—as the myth of Ahilaya in the Ramayana amply illustrates. Their divinity lies in their power, as representing forces of nature or powerful emotions. Varun god of the seas; Pawan, the wind-god; Vishwakarma, the god of manual skills; Kuber, god of wealth; etc. belong to this category.

The Netherlands are ruled by the all-powerful Yamaraj or Dharmaraj. He is the prime messenger of death and also the god of Dharma or virtue. There is a merger of the two functions, because it is only at death that the balance of a man's virtues and vices are evaluated, and the fate for the next birth or period of confinement to heaven or hell decided. Dharmaraj keeps an accurate track of every men's deeds, helped by his assistant Chitra Gupta who maintains a kind of diary with credit and debit for good and bad deeds.

Yamaraj is a very important divinity, not because he descends in his chariot and takes up the dead. His appearance means the end of life. As Dharmaraj he keeps the track of good and bad deeds. Though he is not worshipped and no idol of his is put in any temple, yet, he has a pictographic representation, which shows him dark blue in colour, furiously standing with his assistants, the *yamadoots*. The *yamadoots*, in turn, are so terrifying that the adjective Yamadoot is used for any ferocious-looking individual.

RIVERS AND LAKES

Feminine anthropomorphic forms are often given to the sacred waters and these are usually black in colour. The two most prominently divine rivers are the river Ganges and the river Jamuna. The waters of these rivers are sacred but more particularly sacred are the sources of the rivers located in the Himalayas, namely Gangotri and Jamnotri. The holiest of the points in the course of the rivers is their confluence called Triveni, near Allahabad. Here three rivers meet. The Ganges, Jamuna and an underground river, Saraswati. There are many holy shrines and places of pilgrimage on the banks of these rivers. Rishikesh, Haridwar, Garh Ganga, Benaras, and Allahabad are important centres for pilgrimage.

Amongst the lakes, the holiest is the lake Mansarover in China near the Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiva. It is said that the lake is full of precious stones. Another lake, the Pushkar lake in Rajasthan, is considered quite divine.

TREES AND PLANTS

Large, overbearing trees that provide shade for the weary traveller, and other trees and plants beneficial to man are considered sacred. There is a couplet about the date palm, denigrating the fact that, it does not provide shade for the traveller and its fruits are located so high up. The most popular, sacred trees and plants are the *bo* tree, *peepal* tree, banana plant, *tulsi* plant, etc.

GODESSES FOR WOMEN

Apart from the universal deities, in which are included all the deities already mentioned, there are numerous local deities. These become important from time to time.

Most of these are women's deities as they are involved in the relationships of women; these include certain *devis* (*Matas*) who have specific myths and days of worship allotted to them. These deities fill in the gaps left by the main Hindu pantheon, dominated as it is by men's relations to their environment, leaving specific women's problems out of the picture.

The four very popular fasts of the four *Matas* (mothers) are related to the four important relationships which a woman enters during her life-time. These relationships are the ones involving much tension and conflict in day-to-day life, namely with the husband, with the mother-in-law, with the husband's sister (*nanad*), and with the husband's brother's wife i.e. *devrani* or *jethani* depending upon whether her husband is younger or elder to his brother. In each of the myths—one connected with each *Mata*—the younger women, i.e. the one who is not in authority, plays an innocent, sacrificing, and good-intentioned part, while the other is cunning, misusing her authority and greedy.

This makes it possible for each woman to identify herself with the good women, and her most hostile next of kin with other women, leading to considerable release of tension, as the other women always suffer in the end for theis misdeeds.

One of these is *Chauth Mata* whose fast *Karva Chauth* is extremely popular and kept by married women. The myth related to Chauth Mata is about seven brothers, their only sister, and wives of the seven brothers who victimize their innocent sister-in-law because she is the darling of her brothers.

The story of *Hoi Mata*, worshipped on *Hoi Ashtami* is about seven brother's wives and their only sister-in-law. Here it is not the sister of the brothers but the wife of the youngest brother, who is made to suffer for her only sister-in-law (husband's sister) out of consideration for her mother-in-law. Here the affinal relatives of the woman—husband's sister and husband's mother—made her suffer, but with the help of Hoi Mata she overcomes all difficulties.

The myth of the third Mata, *Sakat Mata*, prayed to by keeping the fast of *Sakat Chauth*, deals with the relationship of devrani (wife of younger brother) and jethani (wife of elder brother). Here also, it is the younger woman who suffers from the craftiness of the older one, but is helped by the Mata, who also punishes the bad woman.

Santoshi Mata is the one deity who has gained great popularity in the last fifteen years. The popularity is much because of the commercial success of a film based on the myth of Santoshi Mata. In the story, the victimized woman is the youngest daughter-in-law in a family of a mother, her seven

sons and their wives. The women who torture her, include all her elder sisters-in-law as well as her mother-in-law. But Santoshi Mata takes care of all her troubles and in the end, all is well.

RISHIS AND MUNIS

Deities and certain objects are by nature divine but divinity can also be achieved. Mortal or ordinary beings can elevate themselves to a higher status of divinity, even though not of the very high order. This can be done through doing meritorious acts and associating closely with sacred objects and at the same time dissociating from mundane ones. There exist between man and the gods, anthropomorphic personages who are more or less divine.

Just above man are the *rishis* and *munis* or hermits and sages who live in remote jungles and mountaineous areas. They are out of most social contacts, live in solitude, needing little or nothing for subsistence, spending most of their time in meditation and contemplation, attempting to acquire more religious merit and harming no one. This process is called *tapasya*. These personages have acquired a state of divinity in which they have powers superior to terrestrial beings, are capable of influencing men's lives, they have the power to curse or grant boons, and even control the forces of nature. They are also able to communicate directly with the gods and interact with them.

The divinity of *rishis* and *munis*, unlike the divinity of gods, is of the nature of an accumulated reservoir. Whenever they curse or grant a boon, they use up part of their accumulated merit and have to make up for it by renewed meditation and penance. Their powers are, however, limited and they do not have the all-pervasive influence of the higher gods. As myths relate, they are often disturbed in their meditation by demons and evil beings called *rakshasas*, and they have to appeal to the gods to help them. Amongst the most famous *rishis* and *munis* are Parashuram, Narad, Valmiki, Vashishta, Gautam, Durvasa, etc. They keep appearing as characters in myths and epics, are perennial and invested with specific characteristics and peculiarities.

Parshuram is a furious-looking person wielding an axe in hand. He is amongst the mightiest of *munis*, known for his strength and valour rather than saintliness. He is reputed to have wiped out all the Kshatriyas twenty-one times from the face of this earth, killing even the children in the wombs of Kshatriya mothers.

Narad is lean and known by a unicord and clappers he holds in his hand and his shaven head and pigtail. He is reputed for his malicious tongue, bad temper, and the fact that he never sits still in one place. His malicious and sharp tongue sparks off quarrels wherever he goes. Nevertheless, he is among the most learned and respected of all sages and is often in communication with the gods. When a person, by his loose talk, causes conflict among people, he is referred to as Narad.

Valmiki is the sage who wrote Ramayana. He was actually a bloodthirsty dacoit who was converted to wisdom and became a great saint; to whom was revealed the life of Rama to come. He is also the creator of poetry (chhand).

Rishi Vashishta was the guru of King Dasaratha's lineage. He had named Rama and his brothers and had trained them in their childhood. Later, after Rama came back from exile and spurned Sita, she took shelter with him. While Sita was at Rishi. Vashista's ashram she gave birth to twins. He named them Lav and Kush and was their guru.

Vishwamitra took Rama and Lakshman from King Dasaratha's court for the purpose of taming demous like Marich, etc. who were hindering his *yajna*. He took them to the jungles and Rama banished Marich a thousand miles into the sea with his bow and arrow. Vishwamitra also took Rama to release Ahilya from her curse. Ahilya was rishi Gautam's wife. Since she was much beautiful, Indra, the king of the gods, cast an evil eye on her and, disguising himself as Ahilya's husband, established sexual relationship with her. Gautam, being a saint of great powers, came to know of this and cursed both Indra and Ahilya. He cursed Indra to become impotent and Ahilya to turn a stone statue. Ahilya begged innocence and explained that she was not aware of Indra's evil designs. Gautam believed her and retreated a little saying that he could not take his curse back but that when Vishnu will incarnate himself as Rama, she will regain her normal being by the latter's touch. So, when

Rama touched her statue by his feet, as directed by Vishwamitra, she regained her form and went away to join her husband. Finally, Vishwamitra took Rama and Lakshman to Janakpuri to participate in Sita's *swayambar* wherein Rama was successful in breaking Lord Shiva's bow—a precondition to marry Sita—and in marrying her.

GOD-MEN

Such beings as above mentioned are, however, unseen, but even on the earth, actually living, flesh and blood individuals can assume proportions of divinity. Some of them are historical figures worthy of ceremonial reverence and worship, perhaps because the passage of time has magnified their qualities and they have been deified. Amongst these are Gautama Buddha (regarded by many Hindus as an incarnation of Vishnu), Manu, Mahavira, Guru Nanak, Meera Bai, Sri Chaitanya, Sant Kabir and Shankaracharya, and in comparatively recent times Sai Baba of Shirdi, Rama Krishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda Sri Ramanuja, and many others.

All of them, are said to have direct communication with God and, in their life-styles, they have demonstrated renunciation of worldly objects, concern for welfare of fellow human beings and, almost invariably, a tirade against whatever oppression or injustice was prevalent in society at that time. This dissent, in many cases, has lead to the establishment of new religions and sects, and in others, reformation of already existing religious practices.

Of the four principles of divinity, the one that operates most amongst such human divinities of god-men is the principles of giving. Nobody has become divine through the pursuit of material aims. Individuals like Gautama Buddha, Mahavira and Meera Bai have acquired sanctity by forsaking the luxury of palaces and kingdoms. Disregard for material objects in such people is complemented by their lack of need for wordly goods. In them, human desires such as acquisitiveness and lust have been replaced by universalistic feelings and love for supernatural beings. Such human divinities are also of different degree of sacredness. Gautama Buddha is considered akin to an incarnation of Vishnu himself, others are regarded as specifically sent

by him to the earth, as his emissaries, like Sai Baba, Rama Krishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda.

Sadhus and mendicants, holy men who occupy sacred shrines or even otherwise, are wise and pious men regarded with reverence because of their association with sacered objects. Two things in a man are immediately recognized as sacred—one, the power of renunciation and second, his power to influence others, mostly in a beneficial way.

God-men and sacred beings are sometimes reputed to have no need for even the basic necessities of life like food, clothing and shelter. A true sadhu, it is said, does not feel warmth and cold, is immune to the stimulation of the senses. He may possess miraculous healing powers, powers to evoke visions of gods, abilities to dispel troubles, to solve problems, and so on.

The need for such flesh-and-blood holy men is a manifestation of anxiety regarding the authenticity of distant divinity. All gods, all deities, do not answer questions. They do not talk back. For most people, the gods are represented on the earth by their images and idols and holy shrines. But the idols are silent; they do not move to advise or help immediately, and men need solutions to their everyday puzzles. Man needs faith to survive the privations and humiliation heaped upon him in daily life. Existentialism is not everyone's cup of tea. Only a very superior human being has the strength and courage to face life on his own; most mortals need a prop to survive. Everybody does not have the mystic powers to commune with the gods. A holy man can do so.

It is the flesh-and-blood divinities, who are real to the senses, who talk, move and act, who are seen actually to perform miracles and holy acts, that provide solace to people that, there are powers superior to their own selves. With this very purpose two of Vishnu's Avtars had descended on the earth to give a practical guide to the many problems that people face. The Avtars were Rama and Krishna. They are represented in what is known as Rama-Lila and Krishna-Lila, both of which serve to guide men in their day-to-day actions.

Chapter Three

AVATARS

Lord Vishnu, it is said, had 8, 10 or 12 incarnations on the earth. Some of the incarnations of Vishnu are Rama, Krishna, Narsimha, Varsha, Vaman, Matsya, and sometime even Lord Buddha is taken to be an incarnation. Out of these, the life of Lord Krishna is divided into two distinct parts, one encompassing his childhood and youth, and the other his adult life.

Most important, Vishnu's incarnations on the earth give us the guide to righteous action as depicted in the great epic poems like the Ramayana, Mahabharat and the religious text of Srimad-Bhagwat. Interestingly enough, the Ramayana or the life of Rama (written by Tulsidasa) is suitable for reading on all occasions, ritual or mundane, while the Mahabharat which is a Krishna story is not read in home's for fear of causing conflict in the family. It is said that the Mahabharat has a lot of fighting and conflict in it. The Srimad Bhagwat is a religious text, read to obtain religions knowledge and used by the lay man in their worship and prayers. The text contains insight into the various relationships between different gods.

RAMA-LILA

The Ramayana is enacted out as a religious play, every year during the Dussehara festival in October-November. The whole enactment lasts eleven days. The story, with reference to the day on which it is acted out, is as follows.

1st Day—The worship of Lord Ganesh which is essential before the commencement of any ritual or holy ceremony.

2nd Day—In the city state of Ayodhya, there once ruled a king called Raja Dasaratha. He had three wives of whom the seniormost was Kaushilya, the next was Kaikeya and the last was Sumitra. The king was sad, for he was advancing in age and was yet without an heir. In desperation he conducted a grand *yajna* or sacrificial ritual conducted by the Muni Vashishta. There appeared out of the *yajna* fire a plate of sweet *kheer*. The king divided the sweet into two equal portions. One he gave to his eldest queen Kaushalya. The other he again divided into two parts giving one to the next queen Kaikeyi, while again dividing the balance into two. Then, taking due permission from the two elder queens, he gave both these parts to the youngest queen Sumitra.

In the course of time, four sons were born to King Dasaratha. One each to the two elder queens and two to the youngest. The sage Vashishta was called to name the young princes. He named the eldest Rama, the second Bharat and the two sons of Sumitra—Lakshman and Shatrughana respectively. As the boys grew up, everyone was enamoured by the beauty and pranks of the little princes, especially the eldest Rama, who was the favourite of all the three queens.

One day Kaushalya gave the little Rama a bath and put him in his cot. She then got busy making preparations for her prayers. Then, she suddenly and surprisingly noticed that the little Rama was eating the offerings she had put before God. Troubled as to how could a baby have climbed out of the cot on its own, she went back to look where it had been sleeping and found him peacefully asleep there. Wonder struck, she ran back and found her child eating the offerings meant for the God. Great fear overtook her at the strange phenomenon of finding her child present at two places at the same time. The child Rama then revealed his identity as Vishnu, the ruler of the world. For Vishnu, in all his majesty, was there before her. Having revealed his true identity, he turned himself back to the infant Rama and by divine will Kaushalya forgot all about the incident, except that he was her son Rama.

3rd Day—The four brothers have now grown into young boys. They form two pairs—Rama, Lakshman and Bharat,

Shatrughana. One day an agitated *rishi* Vishwamitra came to the court of Raja Dasaratha. The *rishi* complained that demons had became a continuous source of trouble to him as they interrupted and desecrated his prayers and rituals. Actually, *rishi* Vishwamitra knew Rama to be the incarnation of Vishnu and had therefore come to request Dasaratha for the services of Rama to fight the demons.

At first, Dasaratha was reluctant. How could a young and tender boy like Rama fight demons whom even the bravest Kshatriya kings failed to conquer? Vishwamitra, however, managed to convince King Dasaratha, that his son possessed rare powers, and he and only he, could kill the demons. So Rama and Lakshmana went off with *rishi* Vishwamitra. Rama and Lakshmana engaged the demons. Marich, the most powerful of them, was thrown away by the arrow of Rama a hundred *yojanas* into the sea. After vanquishing the demons, the boys were lead by Vishwamitra to a deserted ashram in the woods. Outside the ashram there was a large slab of stone. Vishwamitra asked Rama to touch the stone. On so doing, the stone turned into a woman—Ahilya. Thus Ahilya had waited hundreds of years, in the form of a stone, for Rama to come and bring her back to life.

Vishwamitra now took Rama and Lakshman to the beautiful kingdom of Raja Janak, called Janakpuri. They were given a royal welcome by the King and entertained by him as guests in his palace.

Lakshman wanted to go and look around the new place; so with permission from the *rishi*, the two brothers set out to admire the city. They came upon the beautiful flower garden of King Janak. Now, at the same time, Raja Janak's daughter, Sita had come there to worship at the temple of Sri Ambika Devi (Parvati) to get a good husband. One of her friends spotted the two boys and drew her attention towards them. As Sita drew nearer to have a look, she came face to face with Rama. She fell in love at first sight and Rama also was struck by her wonderous beauty. Sita, however, well knew that her father would marry her to him who could break the famous Shiva's bow. Sita subdued her feelings and quickly went away, all the

while thinking of Rama. Rama also came back thinking of her.

4th Day—Raja Janak had a great bow lying in his court which was Shiva's bow. No mortal had been able to move the bow even by a hair's breadth. Raja Janak had made a vow that he would marry his daughter only to him who shall be able to lift and break the bow.

At the time Rama and Lakshman were at Janakpuri; the *Swayambar* (marriage) of Sita was being arranged. Kings from all over the country had assembled at Raja Janak's court. One by one, each one of them came up and tried his luck but, let alone breaking the bow, none of them could even move it. At last Lakshman turned towards his brother and asked permission to try his luck. But Lord Rama bid him to sit down and himself went up; effortlessly lifted the bow and broke it into two. Heaven and earth shook and there was great thunder, for Shiva's bow had been broken. A happy Sita was brought forward to garland Rama as her husband.

The *muni* Parashuram heard the great sound, and appeared dressed like a warrior at the king's court. In great fury he demanded to know the name of the person who had dared to break Shiva's bow. Lakshman engaged him in a verbal duel, answering the *rishi* with great impudence. Parashuram, in a rage, threatened to kill him but Rama intervened and appeased the *rishi's* rage with sweet and soothing words. Somewhat molified, Parashuram extended Vishnu's bow to Rama, asking him to break it to prove his greatness. The bow flew of its own accord out of the hands of Parashuram and went to Rama. Parashuram, at once realized who Rama must really be and bowed to him and went away.

Messengers were sent to Raja Dasaratha, announcing the marriage of Rama with Sita. A great and splendid procession started from Ayodhya to Janakpuri, carrying Raja Dasarath, *rishi* Vashishta and Bharat and Shatrughana with thousands of retainers. In Janakpuri, the marriage was solemnized with great pomp and grandeur. After Rama, his three younger brothers were also married to beautiful princesses, from splendid families Lakshman beeing married to Sita's own younger sister, Urmila.

5th Day—After Rama's marriage, one day Raja Dasaratha

looked in a mirror and saw a white strand. He decided that it was time to announce Rama as Yuvraj and put him on the throne. The news about Rama's installation made everyone happy but there was one ugly hunch-backed maidservant who could not stand all the happiness around her. She went to Kaikeyi, Dasaratha's second queen and Bharat's mother, and poisoned her mind against Kaushalya and Rama. Kaikeyi then used her influence on the king to grant her the three boons once pledged by the king. Once when Raja Dasaratha had been brought, mortally wounded from the battlefield, Kaikeyi had painstakingly nursed him back to life. Raja Dasrath had asked Kaikeyi to ask for three wishes and they would be granted to her. Kaikeyi did not want anything then, but she made Raja Dasartha promise that she was entitled to three boons anytime.

The three boons that Kaikeyi asked were: first, Rama should be dethroned; second, her son Bharat should be made king; and third, Rama should be exiled for fourteen years to live as hermit in the jungles. As a king, Raja Dasaratha had to keep his words, and in great grief he granted her the three wishes.

Sita and Lakshman insisted and accompanied Rama into the jungles. Bharat was greatly angered at his mother and after meeting Rama in the jungles, brought back his foot-wear to be placed on the throne, and himself took on a life of penance, giving up all comforts of the palace and looking after the kingdom in Rama's absence. Soon after, Raja Dasaratha died, lamenting his son.

In the jungles Rama, Lakshman and Sita had many adventures. After wandering around for some time, they built an *ashram* at Chitrakoot and started living there.

Surpanakha, the sister of demon king Ravana, saw Rama and Lakshman and was enchanted by their good looks. She took on the form of a beautiful woman and approached each brother in turn, but was politely rejected by both. In frustration, she assumed her real demonic form and charged them, in an attempt to eat them. Lakshman did not kill her but sent her off after cutting off her ears and nose. Howling in pain and anger, she went for succour to Khar and Dushan, the mighty demons



Lakshman, a boatman, Rama, and Sita in the forest—Rama and Sita are sitting and a boatman is washing Rama's feet. Both Rama and Sita have their one hand raised in blessing. Lakshman is standing in attendance. Both Rama and Lakshman are wearing garlands and the sacred thread. There is a peacock and some birds in the foreground and a tree and river in the background.

whom nobody had been able to conquer. Khar and Dushan, along with their third brother Trishira, came to fight Rama but were defeated and killed by Rama and Lakshmana.

6th Day—Surpanakha then went to her brother Ravana and related her complaint. Ravana was astonished at the mighty princes who had killed the unconquerable Khar and Dushan. He understood that it could only be Narayan Bhagwan (Vishnu) in the form of a human. He then called Marich and they made a secret plan. Marich took the form of a golden deer and ran around the Ashram of Rama and Sita. Sita took a fascination to the deer and asked Rama to get it for her. Though reluctant to leave her alone, Rama obeyed her and pursued the deer, leaving her in Lakshman's charge. Giving chase, he killed the deer, who died after taking on his original form. While dying Marich imitated Rama's voice and uttered Lakshman's name.

Sita heard Lakshman's name being called and, thinking that it was Rama calling him in distress, implored Lakshman to go and help his brother. Lakshman at first refused, telling Sita that nothing could ever possibly happen to Rama. Sita, in a state of distress, accused Lakshman of deliberately withholding help from his brother as he secretely coveted her. Feeling hurt, Lakshman went off to the aide of Rama. In the meantime Ravana exploited the absence of Rama and Lakshman from the ashram to forcibly seize and abduct Sita. A distressed and lamenting Sita was dragged into Ravana's chariot and taken away. On the way, Sita threw down from the chariot, one by one, her ornaments and pieces from her clothing. In flight the king of vultures, Jatayu, challenged Ravana and was mortally wounded.

When Rama and Lakshman came back to the ashram, they realized that Sita was nowhere around, and immediately set out in search of her. On the way they came upon Jatayu who, with his last dying breath, managed to tell Rama that Sita had been abducted by Ravana.

7th Day—In search of Sita, Rama and Lakhman came to Rishyamook, a mountain in which the monkey-king Sugreev lived with his councillors and friends. Sugreev was told of the arrival of two beautiful princes in the guise of monks to his

region. He sent his associate Hanuman, the son of Pawan, the wind-god, to find out the details. Hanuman approached the princes and recognized Rama as Bhagwan and bowed down to him in servitude. Hanuman, was informed of Sita's abduction; he then conducted Rama to Sugreev.

Rama enquired from Sugreev as to why he was living in exile in the the mountains. Sugreev told him his story. His brother Bali, had usurped his kingdom and banished him from it. Since Bali was much stronger than him, Sugreev had no option but to live in constant fear of his brother and in exile.

Rama assured Sugreev of his help and sent him to fight Bali. It was very easy for Bali to defeat Sugreev in a straight fight, for Rama did nothing. The defeated Sugreev asked Rama as to why he had not helped him in the fight. Rama replied that he could not distinguish between the two of them (both being monkeys) and so he was not able to kill Bali. Again, Sugreev was sent to fight Bali but this time Rama put a garland around Sugreev's neck and hid himself behind a tree. In the fight Sugreev soon fell but Rama at once killed Bali with an arrow shot from his bow. Before Bali died, Rama revealed himself to him. Bali was overjoyed at being killed at the hands of the Lord and entrusted his son Angad to him. Rama than installed Sugreev as the King and Angad as the crown-prince. Sugreev then sent all his monkeys including his generals, Hanuman, Angad, etc. in search of Sita. After searching far and wide they came to the sea coast. There they met the vulture Sampati, the brother of Jatayu, who told them about Ravana's kingdom across the ocean, where Sita could be found.

The news about Sita's whereabouts was conveyed to Rama. Rama then sent Hanuman to Lanka, the abode of Ravana, to get news of Sita's welfare. The mighty Hanuman started off and crossed the hundred-*yojana* long sea in one jump. Coming to Lanka he searched for Sita and found her in a forest called Ashoka Vana. He found her in a sorry state, attended to by the slaves of Ravana. Ravana had ordered Sita to be tortured, for she had spurned his amourous advances. One of the slaves had a dream that Sita was none other than the wife of the Lord of the Heaven and Earth and that all the *rakshasas* were to be destroyed as a result of Ravana's abduction of Sita. So this

attendent secretly took good care of Sita.

Hanuman approached Sita and revealed his identity to her, showing the finger-ring given by Rama. After passing Rama's message to Sita; Hanuman proceeded to kill the *rakshasas* who were guarding Ashok Vana and went on a rampage around the city. On hearing that a mighty monkey was causing havoc around his city, Ravana ordered him to be captured and brought to his court. Hanuman willingly let himself be captured. Once in Ravana's court, he declared himself to be a messenger of Rama and urged Ravana to return Sita to Rama or, otherwise, to await his own destruction as well as of his city. Ravana scoffed at Hanuman. He ordered that a length of cloth be tied around Hanuman's tail and it be set on fire. Ravana's attendants brought cloth to be tied around Hanuman's tail, and as they wound the cloth the tail became longer and longer; till it became really huge. The attendants of Ravana poured oil all over the tail and set it on fire, thinking that Hanuman would perish in the flames. Hanuman, the son of the wind-god was indestructible. Swishing his burning tail, he jumped all around the city of Lanka, setting much of the city on fire. Once Lanka was burning brightly, Hanuman set out on his journey back to Rama. Hanuman came back to tell Rama about Sita's plight in Ashok Vana.

8th Day—Ravana's younger brother, Vibhishan, unlike all his other brothers, was a god-fearing saintly person. When he heard of Ravana's abduction of Sita and the coming of Rama to rescue her, he got a foreboding of disaster and begged Ravana to abide by the moral rules and return Sita to her lawful husband. He reminded Ravana that no ordinary mortal could kill Khar, Dushan and Trishira and no ordinary monkey could jump over the 100 *yojana* wide sea. The prince Rama can be no other than Narayan Bhagwan himself; to fight him would only mean an act of self-destruction. Ravana payed no heed to these sensible words of Vibhishan but instead kicked him and asked him to get out. A mortified Vibhishan then set out to join Rama and came to him and asked to be taken into the fold of servitude to the Lord.

Rama now proceeded to organize the movement of his troop of monkeys and bears to fight Ravana. There were two monkeys, Neel and Nal, who had the boon granted to them

by Brahma, that they would be master builders and architects. They asked the other monkeys to provide them with material; boulders and trees, to enable them to build a bridge across the ocean. Before commencing to build the bridge, Rama, worships Shiva and established an idol of Shiva, which is called Shri Rameshwaram. Rama explained that he (i.e., Vishnu) and Shiva are indivisible and whosoever worships him without having faith in Shiva, will get no fruits from his worship. After the establishment of Shri Rameshwaram the bridge was built fast. Before the troops were asked to cross over, Rama made a last effort to win over Ravana peacefully. He sent Angad as a messenger.

Angad's arrival in Ravana's court caused a great commotion, because the memory of the havoc caused by Hanuman was still fresh in the minds of Lanka dwellers. Ravana was irritated by the disconcertation amongst his courtiers. Angad delivered Ravana the message from Rama, asking for Sita to be returned peacefully. Angad further told Ravana that as he himself was the son of Ravana's good friend, Bali, he would not like Ravana to be killed quite uselessly. But Ravana scoffed at him, argued that Rama was weak with grief at separation from his wife, and his younger brother was overcome with sympathy for him and in a likewise sorry state, that Sugreev was a weakling and his trusted general Jambuvant had become old, that there were only a few small monkeys in Rama's troop; how would they win over the mighty Ravana? At the same time, Ravana conceded that yes, there was one mighty monkey—the one who came earlier and set Lanka on fire.

At this, Angad laughed and told him that the monkey who came earlier on, was only an ordinary messenger. He was no warrior. If Ravana was so impressed by him, then he was badly prepared for all that Rama had in store for him. Ravana was angered by Angad's words and asked him to be thrown out of the court. Angad then planted one foot firmly on the ground and announced that if anyone was able, so much as to move his foot even a little, Rama would withdraw along with his troops and Ravana could have Sita. One by one all the mighty warriors of Ravana heaved and pulled at Angad's foot but not one of them succeeded in lifting it off the ground. When everyone was defeated Ravana himself came down from

his throne to try his hand at Angad's foot. Angad then addressed Ravana, "You need not touch my feet; instead, touch those of my master who can give you eternal salvation". Saying this he left the court and went back to where Rama was.

Rama's troops of monkeys and bears then crossed over the bridge to Lanka and the battle began. In course of the first day Lakshman was hit by an arrow from Meghnad and went into a coma. The *rakshasas* from Ravana's side tried to take away Lakshman but were unable to pick him up, since he was the incarnation of Shesh Nag, the 'cobra' who holds the world on its head. Hanuman came, easily lifted Lakshman and carried him back to safety.

A physician was urgently needed to attend to the casualty. So Hanuman took on a very small form and went to Lanka to fetch the renounced physician Sushen. The physician came and prescribed some herbs. Hanuman was sent to bring the herbs from a particular mountain. Failing to recognize the particular herb, he uplifted the whole mountain and flew back with it.

While Hanuman was flying over Ayodhya with the mountain, Bharat was confused by the appearance of a strange dark cloud which Hanuman flying with the mountain looked like, and brought him down with an arrow. Hanuman fell to the ground and uttered Rama's name. On hearing this name, Bharat lifted Hanuman and pressed him to his heart as he came to know him as an associate of Rama. Hanuman told him the whole story and Bharat lamented at his inability to help Rama and Lakshman and sent Hanuman on his way with his blessings.

Once the herbs were brought, Lakshman was quickly revived by Sushen. On hearing that Lakshman was alive, Ravana in distress ran to his brother Khumbhkaran and tried to wake him up. Kumbhkaran could be woken up with great difficulty, as he was in the habit of continuously keeping awake for six months and then continuously sleeping for the next six months. Kumbhkaran first condemned Ravana's folly in kidnapping Sita but then agreed to fight. First, he asked to be fed millions of buffaloes and millions of casks of wine which were immediately brought to him. After gulping all the buffaloes and drinking all the wine, he came to the battlefield. At

the sight of Kumbhkaran all the monkeys and bears were terrified. Sugreev came forward to engage him and soon cut off his ears and nose. But then Kumbhkaran dashed Sugreev to the ground. Rama then himself came to fight Kumbhkaran. He killed Kumbhkaran by severing his head from his shoulders. The severed head flew up in the air, then came down and landed at Rama's feet.

9th Day—After the death of Kumbhkaran, Ravana sent his son Meghnad to battle. Meghnad was an indestructible warrior but after a pitched battle, his head was severed by Lakshman and it went and fell at the feet of his devoted wife Sulochana. Sulochana was a religious and devout woman. She came running to Rama and asked him, "I have always worshipped you; so why have you killed my husband?" Rama told her that her husband would go straight to heaven by virtue of being killed by his own hands. On hearing this, Sulochana prepared a funeral pyre and entered it keeping her husband's head in her lap. Thus the couple ascended to heaven.

At Meghanad's death, Ravana was greatly distressed and went to Shiva's image and started praying fervently. Shiva was moved to pity and he summoned Ahi Ravana, who appeared before Ravana and enquired of him as to what the matter was. Ravana related to him all the events. Then, Ahi Ravana told Ravana that he had not done well in displeasing the Lord of the world. Anyway, as the damage was done, he would help kill Rama and Lakshman and thus he, Ahi Ravana, would establish himself as the greatest of all *rakshasas*. Ahi Ravana told Ravana to look up at the night sky and when at night the sky was lit, he should know that Rama and Lakshmana had been kidnapped.

Actually, Ahi Ravana was the son of Ravana and Mandodari, but Ravana had abondoned him as a child because his birth had been divined as being equal to that of twenty snakes. The abondoned baby had bored his way down the earth and appeared in the seas where the wife of Ketu had brought him up. Later she came to know that he was a son of Ravana and named him Ahi Ravana. When Ahi Ravana came to know his parentage, he went to the under-world (Patal Lok). There he had done penance in front of Kamada Devi. After fourteen thousand years of penance Kamada Devi appeared

before him. Ahi Ravana asked for some boons: he should be able to enjoy all the pleaseures of life; no one in heaven and on the earth should be able to kill him, and his father, who had abondoned him, should at some stage of his life, ask for his help. Kamada Devi had granted him all the boons but she cautioned him that although no one would be able to kill him, yet there was one monkey over whom she has no control.

When Ahi Ravana went to Rama and Lakshman, he used all his magic powers. Everything became enclosed in pitch darkness and no one could see anything. He picked up Rama and Lakshmana and flew with them up in the sky. The sky became lit, and Ravana saw the light and rejoiced for Ahi Ravana had succeeded in his mission. Ahi Ravana carried Rama and Lakshmana to his own domain and prepared to sacrifice them in front of Kamada Devi.

The monkeys and bears of Rama's army realized that their leaders had been kidnapped. The news created great consternation in their camps. Perchance, the ever vigilant Hanuman overheard a pair of vultures. The female vulture expressed her desire for human flesh and the male one informed her that Ahi Ravana was going to sacrifice Rama and Lakshman in Patal Lok and he would get her human flesh from there.

Hanuman hurried to Patal Lok where he found that numerous well armed demons had gathered and that elaborate preparations were being made for sacrifice. Hanuman assumed a minute form and entered one of the flowers meant to be offered to Devi. As soon as the flowers were offered, Hanuman took on a very huge form. The Devi disappeared underground and Hanuman stood in her place. The *rakshasas* thought Devi was pleased and had come alive; so they rejoiced. When Rama and Lakshman were brought for sacrifice, Hanuman picked them up, put them on his shoulders and snatched sword from a *rakshasa* who was preparing to behead them. In the ensuing fight he killed many *rakshasas* and ultimately beheaded Ahi Ravana whose head he threw into the sacrificial fire. Hanuman then brought back Rama and Lakshman to earth.

10th Day—Finding all his brothers and sons killed, Ravana himself came to the battlefield and confronted Rama. Rama sent out millions of arrows from his bow. The arrows would

cut off the ten heads and twenty arms of Ravana, but his heads and hands would grow back again and again. Ravana sent back powerful arrow shots and one by one he defeated Hanuman, Vibhishan, Jumbuvant. By nightfall, the army of monkeys and bears was exhausted and all the powerful warriors of Rama's army defeated. Even Rama was unable to kill Ravana, for everytime he cut off his heads and arms, they reappeared afresh.

All the while, the maidservant who looked after Sita kept her informed about the happenings on the battlefield. Sita felt very frustrated. The servant Tridasha told Sita that Ravana would die if Rama shot him through the heart. But in Ravana's heart there was Sita, in Sita's heart there dwelled Rama, and within Rama was encampassed all the worlds, so that if Rama shot Ravana through the heart, there would be great upheaval and destruction in the world. There was only one solution. If Rama, once cutting off Ravana's heads and arms, could for a moment distract him with the pain, and if in his agony Ravana might forget Sita for a moment, then he could be killed by Rama.

Next day Vibhishan informed Rama that Ravana had the elixir of life (*Amrit*) in his navel and only if he was hit by such an arrow which dries up the elixir, will he die. When Rama and Ravana again met in battle, Rama shot Ravana through the navel and at the same time severed his heads. The *Amrit* dried up and Ravana died. His severed heads and arms fell at the feet of Mandodari, his wife. Rama then resurrected all the monkeys and bears who had died in the battle and the dead demons went to heaven, including Ravana.

11th Day—Rama brought back Sita from Lanka and everyone went back to Ayodhya; by this time the period of fourteen-year exile imposed on Rama was over. Before leaving Lanka, Rama installed Vibhishan as the king thereof. On reaching Ayodhya they all met Bharat and the mothers who welcomed them back with great rejoicing. Rama was then installed on the throne as the king of Ayodhya and Sita was made the queen.



Rama and Bharat's reunion—Rama is embracing Bharat on his return from exile. Bharat's head is resting on Rama's shoulders. Just behind Rama is Lakshman. Shatrughan is crouching. Sita is standing at the back and on the far right is the boatman. In the background is a hut whose doorway is posted with arms.

TWO RAMAYANAS

It is said that there are 17 versions of the story of Rama. Three of them are well known. Each one is named after its author. The three are Valmiki Ramayana, Tulsidasa Ramayana and Sanjeevani Ramayana. The most popular, Tulsidasa's Ramayana was written by poet Tulsidasa in Avadhi dialect of Hindi—the common language of those times (circa 1650 A.D.) as a way of bringing to the common people the text of the Ramayana, originally written in Sanskrit by a dacoit-turned-sage called Valmiki. In this adoption however, he made important changes in style and also modifications in content. This appears to have been done keeping in mind the general morality of the populace of that time. Also a conscious effort was made to deify Sri Rama as a God, rather than as a man out to set precepts or ideals, as in the Valmiki Ramayana.

The Rama of Valmiki is a 'flesh and blood' figure, and that of Tulsidasa is a superhuman god who has descended on the earth to play a part or *lila*, in an effort to demonstrate ideals. Valmiki's treatment of the subject is historical and the text is highly lyrical and intellectual; Tulsidasa's work is devotional and lucidly written with many fine descriptions of people and places. There is also an overemphasis on goodness and beauty. Most of the unpleasant things, the 'immoral' aspects, have been glossed over and presented in a different light. For example, Tulsidasa goes to great lengths to describe Sita's beautiful face but will not refer, as Valmiki does, to Sita's shapely buttocks.

In Tulsidasa Ramayana, Rama is more god than human, except for the description of his childhood which is a delightful description of a playful child, loved and wanted by all. In fact it is in childhood and in youth that the human aspect of Rama are in the foreground. In most of the text, however, the *lila* aspect is emphasized, i.e. Rama is actually *Bhagwan* in human form, and all that he is doing is an enactment only to set an example before human beings of morality and proper conduct. The most controversial and painful aspect of the Valmiki Ramayana are re-explained in the form of a *lila* in order to rationalize them and present them in a softer light.

For instance, Kaikeyi's insistence on the banishment of Rama as instigated by Manthara, the crooked maidservant, is

in Tulsidasa's Ramayana only one factor in the cycle of events that would eventually lead Rama to the destruction of Ravana the demon-king. Only to this effect, the gods conspire and send goddess Sarswati to whisper into Manthara's ears, to corrupt her mind and give her the requisite cunning, to be able to poison Kaikeyi's mind. In this case, both Kaikeyi and Manthara become helpless victims, rather than cunning geniuses; the ugly fact that Kaikeyi was the stepmother of Rama and she conspired to set her own son on the throne in his place, is thus presented in a different light.

The whole episode of Rama's banishment in the Valmiki Ramayana is presented as a palace intrigue. Sita, when she learns of Rama's decision to leave her and go to the jungles, is highly agitated and in her efforts to persuade him to take her along, even accuses him of being an eunuch; for who else would leave a young and pretty wife at the mercy of his younger brother, i.e. Bharat? Lakshman even suggests dissent and accuses the king, his father, of being senile and misled by a pretty wife. Queen Kaushalya, similarly expresses unhappiness at being left at the mercy of a co-wife and her son, and expresses strong doubts about her own fate. Everyone, except Rama, expresses genuinely human emotions of insecurity, anger and doubt. All this has been deleted by Tulsidasa, where all concerned (Sita, Kaushalya, Lakshman) only express obedience and conformity to Raja Dasaratha's decision.

Sita's abduction by Ravana is another controversial aspect of Ramayana. Accepting the fact that Rama was God, it becomes unacceptable that he should allow his wife to be kidnapped by a demon, Moreover, should he not know the reality of the golden dear? Tulsidasa again gives a complete reinterpretation. Rama, again as part of his plot to kill Ravana, himself creates this *lila*. Rama has the moral problem as a Kshatriya to kill Ravana without any provocation from the latter's side. Hence Rama, as the motivator of all things, stages the entire drama. Before embarking upon it, he asks Sita to remove herself and place her shadow in her own place. Sita enters inside a fire and leaves only her shadow outside which substitutes for her. Ravana, when he abducts Sita, thus comes in contact, only with her shadow and not with the real Sita. This addendum in the Tulsidasa Ramayana dissolves all doubts

regarding Sita's chastity which the Valmiki Ramayana raises in the minds of the devotees.

Another popular episode, but from the Sanjivani Ramayana which puts to doubt the perfection of Sita, is the event of Sita crossing over the line drawn by Lakshman—when she sends him after Rama in the incident of the golden deer. In the original writing of Valmiki, when Rama kills Marich (disguised as the golden deer), Marich, as a cunning trick, imitates the voice of Rama to call out Lakshman's name. Sita, mistaking the voice of Marich to be that of Rama in distress implores Lakshman to go and help Rama.

Lakshman, who has been ordered by Rama not to leave Sita alone, refuses to go. But Sita in anger accuses him of secretly coveting her. Lakshman, forced to go by Sita's taunts, draws a line (the *Lakshman Rekha*) outside Sita's cottage, requesting her not to go beyond it on any account. The magical line would prevent any outsider from reaching Sita in her cottage. If any outsider attempted to cross the line he would be burnt and reduced to ashes.

Ravana, dressed as a *muni*, comes to beg alms from Sita, who asks him to come to her door to accept the alms. Ravana is aware of the power of *Lakshman Rekha* and his own incapacity to enter within the boundaries of the line. He asks Sita to come out and give him alms. Sita, disregarding Lakshman's advice, steps out and is seized by Ravana.

Tulsidas, has completely ignored the episode of the Lakshman Rekha and instead made a better person even of Marich. Marich is shown to be desirous of dying at the hands of Rama in order to get eternal salvation. When hit by Rama's arrow, he cries out "He Rama He Lakshman", in adoration rather than in cunning and only the latter half of what he said is heard by Sita, who sends Lakshman after the call. Ravana, who had only been waiting, grabs Sita and abducts her.

There are also significant differences concerning the episode of Bali and Sugreev. In the Valmiki version, the reason for enmity between Bali and Sugreev is that Bali seduces the wife of his brother cum-co-king Sugreev and throws him out of his kingdom. Tulsidasa, in his effort to avoid reference to moral turpitude, has given a different version of the reason for enmity between them.

Tulsidas relates it to a fight which Bali and Sugreev had with a demon. Bali chased the demon inside a cave and called out to Sugreev that if within fifteen days he did not come out, then Sugreev should take him as dead and return to take charge of their kingdom. Sugreev waited for about two months, during which period there were loud noises heard from inside the cave and streams of blood were coming out from it. Sugreev was frightened that the demon had killed Bali and would kill him also. Surgeev blocked the mouth of the cave with a rock and came away. After a few more days Bali managed to kill the demon and came back to his kingdom. He accused Sugreev of attempting to kill him by shutting him up in the cave. He chased Sugreev out of the kingdom and reigned alone.

In Valmiki Ramayana, Bali drove away Surgreev from their joint kingdom in order to marry Sugreev's wife. Later when Bali was killed by Rama, his wife, Tara is taken over by Sugreev. Then, Sugreev, so lost himself in enjoying his two women, his own wife and his brother's widow, that he even forgot the promise made to Rama, viz. the promise made to help the latter to find Sita. Only when an angry Rama threatened to wipe him off, that he came to his senses.

In the Tulsidasa Ramayana, Sugreev did not show any such misdemenour. The episode of breach of morality, viz. coveting a younger brother's wife, is converted to one of misunderstanding, absolving either party of blame.

When Bali was mortally wounded and dying, he asked Rama the reason for his killing him. Rama told him that he had committed a great sin as the wife of a younger brother was like one's own daughter-in-law, and the younger brother like a son. This part of Rama's speech was retained in the Tulsidasa version without the relavent part of the antecedent story.

Tulsidasa himself poses the question: why did Rama have to receive help from monkeys and wage a regular war to rescue Sita? The answer is also given there. He wanted to demonstrate the strategies of war to all Kshatriyas. All the events in the Ramayana fit into this pattern of demonstration of ideals of conduct, specifically in times of crises. The very fact of Rama taking birth as a human being is rationalized in this way: Otherwise God Almighty can eliminate anybody at will. But the main theme of the Ramayana is against activites that

are idiosyncratic and willful. One must obey rules and regulations, one must conform to the existing order of things. The *dharma* has to be upheld. To achieve any end, the means must be proper, as laid down by the basic tenets of Hinduism and of *dharma* and *karma*.

Thus comes the crucial act of Rama, refusing to accept Sita after he had rescued her from Ravana's abode. In Valimiki Ramayana, Rama explicity tells Sita that his rescue of hers was a necessary confirmation of his *dharma* as a Kshatriya. Personally, he had no use of a wife who had been touched by the hands of another man. She should, therefore, give a demonstration of her purity and chastity by the trial of fire (*agni pariksha*). In the trial that followed, Sita came out unscathed.

Tulsidasa pre-emptly had earlier changed the whole concept of Sita's capture and rescue to only a *lila* or drama, a demonstration by Rama of certain social rules. Rama had asked Sita to hide herself inside fire and allow only her shadow to enact the drama of her capture. Thus after rescuing Sita, Rama, according to Tulsidasa, said a few bitter words to Sita (not specified as to what actually was said) and Sita set out for the *agni pariksha* (which was really fake). This was done to get the real Sita out of the fire and replace the shadow back into it. So it was only after the *agni pariksha* that the real Sita came out. One of the most painful episodes, the estrangement of Rama and Sita over Sita's chastity is reduced by Tulsidasa, to a game played by Rama and Sita. This, incidentally, also has the benefit of demonstrating the *dharma* of an ideal Kshatriya king and of an ideal wife.

Tulsidasa Ramayana ends with the installation of Rama as a king and the unison of the brothers with their respective wives: the establishment of Rama Rajya; the ideal rule of an ideal king. The controversial episodes of the ending of Valmiki Ramayana are completely eliminated. The following is a story that is partly drawn from Valmiki Ramayana and of the rest the origin is unknown. The story goes as such: Rama overhears a washer-woman talking to her husband that Rama has accepted Sita who is unchaste. Rama feels that his honour as a king is at stake. He sends Sita off to the *ashram* of his *guru* Vashishta. There, twins, namely Lav and Kush are born to Sita, who grow up under the tutelage of the *muni*. In the meantime,

Rama decides to hold an *ashvamedh yajna*. As part of the *yajna* a horse is let loose. Wheresoever the horse goes, no one may stop it. Anyone who dares to hold the horse, challenges thereby the authority of the king. The *ashvamedh* horse comes to where Luv and Kush are, and they seize the horse. The news reaches the royal palace. Lakshman is charged with getting the horse released and punishing the defiant. Lakshman approaches the twin brothers to release the *ashvamedh* horse. The brothers refuse and a fight ensues. Sita implores her children not to fight Lakshman but they do not listen to her. In the fighting, Lakshman is defeated.

Rama comes to know of Lakshman's defeat and himself comes to fight the battle. Now Luv and Kush engage Rama in a fight that goes on without approaching an end. The arrows of the combatants destroy each one, the other. At this stage the sage Valmiki intervenes. He makes known to Luv and Kush that Rama is their father, a fact that Rama was himself suspecting, for who but Rama's own children could have defeated Lakshman.

The young boys demand to know from their father as to why he has ill-treated their mother. Rama, agrees to take the boys and Sita back with him on the condition that Sita undergoes another test of fire to prove her chastity. Sita is anguished at this. She prays to Mother Earth to take her back. There follow loud thunderous noises, the Earth opens up and Sita descends into the bowels of the Earth.

One important theme of the Tulsidas Ramayana is the constant reference to cause and effect and the cyclical nature of events. Nothing takes place without an antecedent, no event is without effect. In Tulsidasa Ramayana, Ravana in his earlier birth, was a great king, Pratapbhanu. He was just, righteous, and conquered many kingdoms. One of the rajas whom he defeated, took shelter in the jungles and assumed the form of a holy man. One day, Pratapbhanu, hunting in the forest, was lured by this pseudo-holy man to his ashram. After convincing Pratapbhanu of his holiness, through a lot of smooth talk, he told him that no species, neither man nor beast nor God, could bring harm to the great king. Only the Brahmin caste had the power to ruin him. He advised Pratapbhanu to arrange a *yajna* to appease the Brahmins and offered all his help. Many hundreds of thousands

of Brahmins are invited to the *yajna*. When the guests assembled the crafty Raja, who was well versed in the magical arts, created a magical kitchen in which a number of tasty dishes were prepared. There was also the flesh of many kinds of birds and animals, but it was polluted with the flesh of Brahmins.

When all the Brahmins had sat down and begun to eat, a voice from the sky announced that the food they were eating was polluted with the flesh of Brahmins. All the Brahmins stood up in protest and anger and cursed Pratapbhanu that in the next birth, not only he, but all his kin would be reborn as demons or *rakshasas*.

Pratapbhanu was reborn as Ravana, his younger brother Arimardan as Kumbhkarna, his Prime Minister, Dharmaruchi as Vibhishan, and all other followers and kinsmen as various *rakshasas*. Nonetheless, Ravana with all his kin and followers, attained *moksha* (freedom from the cycle of birth and rebirths) after being killed at the hands of Bhagwan Vishnu himself. After all, Ravana and others had become demons, having erred in circumstances over which they had no control (i.e., through the machinations of an evil genius). They had otherwise been just and righteous in their earlier life.

Even Vishnu's incarnation on the earth was to have a precedent and it was provided by a curse put on him by *muni* Narada. The story goes like this. Once Narada sat down to pray or do *tapasya*; the intensity of his devotion was such that the king of Devlok (heaven), Indra felt quite disturbed. Narada might, he thought, become powerful enough to claim his throne. He, therefore, sent Kamadev (the God of Love) to distract Narada from his *samadhi* (meditation). Despite his best efforts Kamadev was unable to disrupt the *samadhi*.

When Narada finished his *samadhi*, he got up, his ego inflated by the fact that even Kamadev had failed to distract him from his meditation. He went to Vishnu and recounted his success. Vishnu was pained to see vanity and pride in Narada, the holiest of sages, moving him towards his own destruction via an inflated ego. Vishnu decided to do a *lila* in order to bring down the ego of Narada. He created the scenario of a magical city, ruled by a prosperous king, whose palace was beautiful and rich, and who had a daughter named Vishva Mohini who was beautiful beyond all imagination.

Narada came to this city and the king invited him to look at his daughter and read what auspicious signs she had. Narada, taking one look at her was enchanted by her beauty and thought to himself—this girl has such auspicious signs, her husband will be the ruler of the three worlds; he himself must marry her, he would then become like Vishnu Bhagwan himself.

Narada fully realized that this was one place where his meditation or learning will not help. For he should be so handsome that this girl would put her garland round his neck in her *swayambar*. Narada went to Vishnu Bhagwan and asked to give him his (God's) looks so that the princess should be enchanted by him (for there is nobody as handsome as Vishnu) and marry him. Vishnu smiled to himself and, while telling Narada that his wish was granted, actually gave him the face of a monkey.

Narada, now full of confidence went to the *swayambar* and waited triumphantly for the princess to come and garland him. When the princess came she was totally repulsed by his monkey face and went past him without a second look. In the meantime, Vishnu himself came to the *swayambar* and the princess, without hesitation, went and placed her garland round his neck. Narada, in great anger, stood up and everyone laughed at his monkey face. He went to a mirror and looked into it, to see the reason for the mirth, and was enraged to see that Vishnu had, instead of giving him a handsome face like his own, had given him the face of a monkey.

In great rage, he went to Vishnu whom he found sitting with Lakshmi on the one side and the princess on the other. He cursed Vishnu for his selfishness and for having deceived him. He told Vishnu that he would one day take human form, suffer the bereavement of a woman and, in his distress, would have to accept help from monkeys. Vishnu accepted Narada's curse and took birth on the earth. In taking birth, he also fulfilled his promise to King Manu and Queen Aditi who had done great penance and got a boon from him that he would be born to them as a son. When Manu and Aditi took birth as Dasaratha and Kaushalya, he was born as their son Rama.

Tulsidas wrote the Ramayana when a great *bhakti* movement was sweeping across the subcontinent. The underlaying emotions of this *bhakti* movement was an unquestioning rapport with God through the practice of showing love. The *bhakti*

movement had no place for intellectualism or everyday rationality—a hall mark of the earlier Hindu texts. Thus, the Tulsidas Ramayana is a work that displays experiences of this love and devotion. It is oriented towards a harmonious relationship with God through the power of love. Neither barriers of caste, nor Brahmins and pundits, nor rituals can come in the way of communicating with God. A person who loves God has the greatest position in the eyes of God, as emphasized again and again in the Tulsidas Ramayana. Rama loves and embraces the Nishada Raja—a person of the lowest caste, an untouchable—because the Nishada Raja has true love for Rama. Jatayu, a vulture, a carrion-eater, the most polluted of all the birds, is loved and blessed by Rama and attains eternal salvation through sacrifice.

Even the demons willingly die at the hands of Rama and attain eternal salvation because they, in their heart of hearts, love Rama. It is this underlaying current of love and *bhakti* that beautifies and makes the Ramayana of Tulsidas highly acceptable to the common people. On reading it, the Tulsidas Ramayana gives peace of mind and helps devotion, whereas the Valmiki Ramayana leaves a painfnl impact on the mind.

CELEBRATIONS OF RAMA-LILA

There are many institutions that celebrate the Rama-Lila. One of the oldest and most important is the Shri Ram Lila Committee Delhi, which celebrates it at the Ram Lila Grounds—just outside the Old City walls—between Delhi Gate and Ajmeri Gate. These particular celebrations can be traced back to the time of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Muslim King, who reigned from his capital at Delhi some 130 years ago. Under his orders, the celebrations began to take place for the entertainment of Hindu soldiers of the Red Fort and he himself used to attend the Dussehara celebrations. At that time the Rama-Lila used to be celebrated behind the Red Fort walls near the river Jamuna. For some years, these celebrations were held at the Tis Hazari Maidan, but with the growing population of Delhi, when hundreds of thousand of people began to come in order to witness the celebrations, the venue of the Rama-Lila was shifted to the present site.

Each organization that celebrates the Rama-Lila takes pride in the pomp and show with which they can organize the function. The height of the effigy of Ravana, his brother and his son, is an important aspect of the competition. On the tenth day of the celebrations when Ravana is killed, the three effigies are set on fire. The burning is all the more spactacular if the effigies contain, as they often do, hundreds of crackers. The effigy of Ravana can measure some 100 feet high. During the celebrations there are no other entertainment programmes such as dancing or singing.

Rama-Lila enactments may be divided into two types—one, the open stage Rama-Lila and the other, with curtains. In the former the stage is always open. In the latter the stage can be curtained off from the audience. It has wings and back-stage. The curtain can be drawn, the stage can be set, and scenes can be changed as in a western theatre.

In the open stage Rama-Lila the whole enactment is a continuous performance. When some actors have finished their part they retire to non-active positions on one side of the stage and other actors may begin to play their part. Usually one scene is enacted on the stage at a time; yet there are occasions when there are two or more scenes being played at the same time. This is possible because the stage may be very, very long, say as long as 75 feet (10 feet high, 25 feet broad) and because one or more of the scenes being enacted may not have spoken lines.

In the open stage version the actors show an empathy with the characters they play, while in the curtained version this is not, or rarely, so. It is popularly said that in the curtained version "Rama" may be smoking a *bidi* off stage, and parts get mixed up and generally there are lots of mistakes. People also joke about the Rama who stammers or the crude improvised language used, since there is no standard text in the form of a play.

In the open stage enactment there are fewer chances of making mistakes because the actors have been mentally prepared to do their parts. They have read the Ramayana often, they have been ordained to abstain from sex, liquor and non-vegetarian food; that is in case they consume these items in day-to-day life. The principal actors like Rama, Lakshman, Sita are

also prepared by fasting and on days they are enacting Rama Lila they eat only once in a day. All the parts are played by young boys and there are no girls; female characters too are played by the boys who are dressed up accordingly.

Again the open stage Rama-Lila is not like a western play as the enactment involves not only playing parts, as in a play, but also a commentary by the priests in certain parts and readings from the Ramayana in certain other parts. The most emotional portions are usually recited from the Ramayana and those parts that are difficult to act out on the stage, are verbally told as in a story. In some parts the Ramayana is acted out, as in a play, and certain portions of the text may be left out altogether. In still others the reciter may tell the story while the actors play their parts without speaking any lines. Fights are usually played out by the actors.

The celebrations usually begin everyday around 4 O'clock in the afternoon when a pageant consisting of as many as 40-50 carriages with tableaux showing the actors depicting different scenes from the Ramayana, start from a predetermined spot. They go through city streets to end up at the grounds where the Rama Lila is to be performed, which usually begins in the evening. People flock in large numbers to watch the pageant pass; it is taken in a spirit of fun and no religious gravity is attached to the tableaux. Nobody goes up to pay homage. But at the cite of the Rama-Lila celebrations, a large audience collects. The crowds do show some religious sentiments as they might repeat the name of Lord Rama or, otherwise, express sorrow or happiness with what is going on, on the stage.

For the V.I.P.s mostly political leaders who come to visit the Rama-Lila, the proceedings are interrupted, the leaders usually annoints Rama, Sita, Lakshman, and then garland them, gives a speech, and after they leave, the Rama-Lila starts again.

KRISHNA-LILA

Krishna was born to Devki (the sister of King Kans) and Vasudev. He was the eighth child of the couple.

Kans, the King of Mathura, perpetuated a reign of terror and sin in his kingdom. He imprisoned the couple because a

voice from the sky had warned him that their son would kill him. Out of animosity, Kans killed the first seven children born to Devki and Vasudev. Before the birth of the eighth child, a voice from the sky warned Kans that the eighth child of Devki will kill him. Kans had a heavy guard placed on the prison so that he could take the eighth new-born child and get rid of it.

The night Krishna was born (he was born at midnight) was the darkest of all nights (annually celebrated as the festival of Janamashtmi). There was torrential rain, thunder and lightning. The rivers of the region overflowed their banks.

The guards of the prison, by divine will, fell asleep and the prison doors opened on their own. Vasudev put the infant Krishna in a basket, carried it on his head, and attempted to take Krishna to a place of safety.

On his way, Vasudev had to cross the river, Jamuna. He entered the river and as he entered deep waters, the level of the river came down and the twelve-headed cobra of the river spread out its hood over Krishna to protect him from the rain. Vasudev was able to take the infant to the safety of a village, called Gokul, where he confined the child to the care of Devki's sister, Yashoda and her husband Nand. In turn, Vasudev took the newly born girl of Yashoda back with him to the prison.

The next day Kans took away the girl. The little girl was held by the legs by Kans and her head was dashed to the ground. The baby, instead of touching ground, soared high up in the air and revealed herself as the goddess Mahamaya. In a loud voice, she declared that the child who would kill Kans was safe and growing up, in Gokul. Kans was left shivering with fear.

Kans despatched his spies to find out who had given birth to a baby on the specific night. The spies went and brought back the news that Yashoda in Gokul had a child born to her on the fateful night.

He then sent an old witch Putna with the specific purpose of killing the child. Putna went to Gokul with her breasts smeared with a deadly poison. She reached Yashoda's house and pretended to be a well-wisher. She offered to suckle the crying baby at her breasts, thinking that the child would suck the poison and die. But the child sucked and bit so hard at the

witch's breasts that Putna fled the spot screaming in pain, while Krishna gurgled merrily, unaffected by the poison.

There are a number of tales about Krishna's growing up in Gokul. One story goes that Yashoda caught Krishna, at that time a crawling infant, eating dirt. She rebuked him and asked him to open his mouth. The child laughed and opened its mouth and an awe-struck Yashoda gazed into it a vast universe containing all the three worlds, namely heaven, earth and hell.

The toddler Krishna would steal and eat the butter and curds from the house of other cowherds. When the neighbours came to complain to Yashoda, he would hide behind her skirts, proclaiming his innocense.

As Krishna grows older, his pranks increase. He became a terror for the milkmaids, breaking their water vessels, spilling their milk, teasing them. The maids carried pitchers full of water or milk on their heads. Krishna would chuck stones and break the pitchers. The water would wet the clothes of the milkmaids. Krishna enjoyed seeing the milkmaids in their wet and clinging clothes. The milkmaids used to go to bathe in the river, leaving their clothes on its banks. Krishna, one day, stole all their clothes and went and sat upon a tree. Coming out of the water the milkmaids were horrified. The naked milkmaids spotted Krishna, upon the tree, bashfully approached him and pleaded and implored him to return their clothes, which he did, after a long time.

It is often asked as to why did Krishna do such a thing. The reply is: he wanted to teach the *gopis* a lesson—viz., not to bathe in the nude. He only gave the *gopis* their clothes, when they promised him this.

The milkmaids also loved the youthful Krishna and their complaints against him were only playful; in particular, they loved to hear him play the flute. The sweet tones of his flute and his dark 'beauty' won him the heart of Radha (or Radhika), a milkmaid, married and much older than him.

At midnight, Krishna would play his flute on the banks of the river, and enticed by his melody, Radha and her friends, the other milkmaids, would sneak out of their houses and go to meet him. There, by the moon light, they would all dance, sing and play. On the festival of Holi all the milkmaids wanted to

dance with Krishna. He therefore appeared in several forms. Now all of them could dance with him at the same time.

Radha's mother and husband were quite suspicious about her relationship with Krishna: Why does she always keep going to him? They would beat her and ill-treat her to prevent her from going to Krishna, but she never listened.

Krishna's boyhood is of a very mischievious and playful youth, except for the sprinkling of miracles performed, which showed him to be what he actually was, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, not just an ordinary mortal.

Once Krishna was playing with his mates on the banks of the river. Their ball fell into the water. Now this part of the river was the domain of Kal Nag, a hundred-headed serpent, who used to gobble up anyone who came into the waters. All the other boys were too scared. Nobody dared go near the water.

Krishna went up and asked the serpent to return the ball. The huge serpent, furious at being called up by a chit of a boy, threatened to kill him. In one nimble leap, Krishna jumped onto Kal Nag's head. Kal Nag felt as if a great weight was crushing his hoods. In despair, he cried for mercy but Krishna continued to jump, from one hood to another, crushing them under his (divine) weight.

Kal Nag's wives came up from under the water on hearing their husband's cries. They begged Krishna to spare the life of their husband. Krishna asked Kal Nag to promise that he would never trouble anyone again. Kal Nag promptly promised that much and Krishna let him go.

Once a deluge hit Gokul and all the cowherds and their cattles were threatened with a watery grave. Everyone appealed to Krishna to save his beloved Gokul from extinction. With the index finger of his left hand, Krishna lifted the Govardhan mount, which acted as a giant umbrella to shelter all the people and cattle of Gokul.

When he reached adolescence, Krishna felt that the time had come for him to claim his legitimate kingdom from his maternal uncle. Kans had, in the meanwhile, continued his reign of terror on the people.

Krishna went to the court of Kans and in full view of a crowded court, challenged Kans to fight. In the fight, Krishna

just split Kans into two pieces, with his bare hands. After the death of Kans, Krishna was declared the King of Mathura. He went back to Gokul to take leave from his beloved foster-parents and the maids. On the day Krishna left for Mathura, not a single eye was dry in Gokul. The most anguished were his foster-mother Yashoda and beloved Radha. As a token of her true love for him, he gave Radha a boon: In time, to came whenever anyone takes his name, he or she would take her name first and she would be worshipped along with him. Thus Krishna is even today called upon as Radhe-Krishna and idols of Radha and Krishna are found together in temples and holy places.

After Krishna become king, his way of life and personality became quite different from the carefree cow herd in Gokul. He married a number of wives of which Rukmini was the seniormost and Satyabhama, the favourite.

The life of Krishna, as an adult, is more popularly revealed through a number of episodes that are often told. He is depicted in his true form as divine and invested with unmatched qualities as a king and a warrior. He plays a central role in the Mahabharata as friend and counsellor to both the Kauravas and the Pandavas. He treats Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, as his sister and plays an important role in the battle of Kurukshetra where he runs the chariot of Arjun and delivers the gospel of Gita.

THE MAHABHARATA

The text of Mahabharata is not read in homes; it is said that reading it in homes causes conflict in the family. The reason, if one looks at the text of the Mahabharata, is obvious. The story involves conflict between brothers and many a tale of immorality; birth of illegitimate children, abduction of women, cheating in dice games, etc. However, some episodes from the Mahabharata are popularly known and are often related.

One tale deals with Arjun's apprenticeship with Guru Dronacharya and depicts the virtue of the power of concentration. Once, Dronacharya, the teacher of both the Pandavas and the Kaurvas, assembled all his pupils to test them in archery. He placed a clay bird on a tree and told his pupils that they must shoot the bird through the eye. He then called each one

by turn and asked them what they saw. All of them, except Arjun, replied that they saw a bird on the tree.

When Arjun fixed his bow and arrow and was looking in front, Dronacharya asked him what he saw. He replied he could see only the eye of the bird and nothing else. Dronacharya was pleased with the power of concentration in which Arjuna could block out everything else from his vision but his target, and said that Arjun was the most superior of all archers.

Another story tells how the five Pandava brothers came to marry Draupadi. The Pandava brothers were wrongfully deprived of their kingdom by their cousins, the Kauravas. They went into the jungles and were living in exile with their mother Kunti.

The king of Panchal had a beautiful daughter named Draupadi. He had arranged for her marriage by swayambar ceremony. The condition was that only the most superior of marksmen would marry his daughter.

Over a pond of water, was placed a jewelled bird which revolved at high speed. The aspirant for marriage was required to shoot the bird through the eye. by looking at the reflection of the bird in the water below.

The five Pandavas, although not in their princely attire, also went for the *swayambar*. Many princes failed to shoot the bird but Arjuna, the ace archer, hit the bird. He thus won the hand of Draupadi.

The five brothers brought Draupadi home. The brothers called out to their mother, Kunti, "See mother, what have we brought for you?" Kunti, thinking that like any other day they had brought choice game, called out, "You share it, between the five of you." The brothers in perplexity looked at each other, but a mother's command was infallible; so the brothers thereafter shared Draupadi as a common wife.

A very popular incidence from the Mahabharata is a court scene where the Kaurvas play a game of dice against their cousins, the Pandavas. The Kauravas were jealous of the prosperity of the Pandavas. They invited Yudhistir, the eldest of the five Pandavas, to their court for a game, knowing well his passion for gambling.

Shakuni, the maternal uncle of the Kaurvas, had a magic dice which used to fall as he wished it and that dice was used

for game. Game after game, Yudhistir went on loosing. He lost all his wealth, lost his kingdom, lost his brothers, and then he lost even himself.

As a last stake he staked Draupadi to the great embarrassment of all his brothers. Even this time he lost. In great triumph, Duryodhan ordered Draupadi to be brought and stripped of her clothing in his open court. A wailing and protesting Draupadi was dragged by her hair into the court by Duryodhan's younger brother Dushashan.

Draupadi, in her distress, appealed to all her husbands who sat helplessly with downcast eyes, for they had gambled and lost their rights over her.

Duryodhan asked Dushashan to strip Draupadi of her dress, the saree. Dushashan began to unwind the long cloth off Draupadi. In her moment of dishonour, Draupadi appealed to divine Krishna, whom she regarded as her brother.

Krishna, knowing all, through his divine powers, caused her saree to become endless. Dushashan, pulled out yards and yards of saree but the cloth was never-ending. At last he exhausted and collapsed. Draupadi thanked Krishna for saving her honour and upkeeping the sacred brother-sister relationship.

The Pandavas came back to claim their share of the kingdom, after twelve years in exile, during which period they had to remain incognite. The Kauravas, however, refused to let the Pandava brothers have their share of the kingdom. So the Pandavas built up an army for combat.

Krishna, who was friend to both the Kauravas and the Pandavas, decided to remain neutral. He called both Duryodhan and Arjun to tell them that to one of them he could give his entire army, and to the other, his own self. However, since he was not to take up arms in battle, he could only be a charioteer.

On getting word of Krishna's decision, Duryodhan and Arjun came to Krishna and found him sleeping. Duryodhan sat down near his head and Arjun near his feet. Krishna woke up and his eyes first fell on Arjun, so he first asked Arjun his choice. Arjun replied that he would rather have him even though it was only as a charioteer. Consequently, Duryodhan got Krishna's entire army and went away quite satisfied that he got the better of the deal.

The war of Kurukshetra is reported through the mouth of Sanjay, the charioteer of king Dhritarashtra, father of the Kaurvas, who being blind, could not see what was happening. Everyday Sanjay would bring him near the battlefield and give a running commentary on all that was happening.

On the first day when Arjun comes to the battlefield he finds all his kinsmen, his elders such as his grand-uncle Bhishma and even his guru Dronacharya lined up on the other side. He found himself unable to raise his arms against such respected elders and dear kins.

In confusion, Arjun turns to Krishna for counsel. Krishna delivers to him, right on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, the sermon of the Gita. He clarifies the concepts of *karma* and *dharma*, *pap* and *punya*, and the nature of the soul and the universe. Arjun's mind was set at rest and the battle started.

Certain incidences of the Kurukshetra battle are again oft-related. One of them is the story of Abhimanyu, the son of Arjun. It is said that while Abhimanyu was in the womb of his mother Subhadra, Arjun was one day explaining to her the formation of the famous battle formation called *Chakra-vyuha*. Subhadra listened, as long as Arjun was telling her, about the formation and the technique of entering it, but she fell asleep while he was telling her about how one gets out. Abhimanyu in the womb of his mother learnt about the entry into the *Chakravyuha* but could not know about coming out.

On the day Abhimanyu came to the battlefield, the great warriors of the Kaurava side formed the *Chakravyuha*. Abhimanyu entered it to fight but was unable to get out. He fought bravely but was deprived of all his weapons, one by one, till he found himself with no weapons. As a last resort he picked up a wheel of his chariot and fought bravely killing many enemies till he himself fell.

Another popular story was that of the defeat of Bhishma by Arjun. Bhishma was so mighty a warrior that the Pandavas found it impossible to defeat him and, on his strength, the Kaurvas were also undefeatable. So Krishna advised Arjun to use Shikhandi as his charioteer. Shikhandi was a princess, who had from childhood, donned boy's clothes and showed an inclination for manly activities. She had grown up inculcating

all the skills of a warrior. But being a woman Bhishma was expected not to strike her.

Shikhandi was called and she drove the chariot. Arjun hid behind her and rained arrows on Bhishma who, seeing Shikhandi in front, was unable to strike back. At long last, Bhishma fell from his chariot but was so riddled with arrows that his body, instead of touching the ground, remained poised on a bed of arrows. Bhishma had the boon of dying at only such a time as he wished; so on his bed of arrows Bhishma waited for an appropriately auspicious moment to leave his mortal body.

As night fell Arjun, Duryodhan and other kinsmen came to visit Bhishma, for he was their most respected elder. Bhishma said, "My head is hanging down, give me a head-rest". Duryodhana immediately brought piles of soft pillows but Bhishma said, "This is not what I need", and looked towards Arjun. Arjun picked up his bow and arrow and sent an arrow through Bhishmas' forehead that rested his head. Then Bhishma asked for water. Duryodhan again brought vessels of water but Bhishma looked towards Arjun again. Arjun sent an arrow into the ground and a spurt of water came out and poured into Bhishma's mouth.

The life of Krishna is full of lessons for the people. The explanation of the doctrine of *karma* and *dharma* are important, but so are the lessons in concentration, the sources and resolution of conflict, and forms of respect. Sometimes, of course, man is helpless and as he and his righteous ways face extinction, it is only God who can help. For this too, Vishnu has several times descended on the earth.

NARSIMHA AVATAR

Out of Vishnu's many *Avatars*, only Kalki is yet to come. Apart from Rama and Krishna, the last two incarnations, the others are rarely worshipped as deities, though they may be mentioned in the context of Vishnu. One more incarnation of Vishnu is of some importance; he is Narsimha Avatar.

Narsimha Avatar descended on the earth for the sole purpose of destroying Hiranakashyapa. The myth of Hiranakashyapa is well known because often it is retold, with the festival of

Holi symbolizing the triumph of faith in the gods over evil. Of the two myths, regarding Hiranakashyapa, one is connected with his son Prahlad and the other, with his destruction featuring Narsimha Avatar.

Hiranakashyapa was a king of great might who, after doing great penance, was granted a boon that he would be killed by neither man nor god nor beast, neither on the ground nor in the sky, by no weapon, neither in the day nor at night, neither inside a house nor outside of it. Having been granted these boons, Hiranakashyapa thought himself to be immortal, for it seemed impossible that he could be killed, fulfilling all these conditions. He began to think himself as great as God. He forebade the worship of God in his kingdom. In his great pride of indestructability, he started perpetuating all kinds of evil deeds. All his subjects were terrorized.

He even prosecuted his own son Prahlad who was an ardent devotee of God. He had his son thrown down from a mountain but the child was unscathed. He ordered elephants to trample him, but the elephants disobeyed the commands. Prahlad was thrown in a pit of snakes but he came out alive. Now, Hiranakashyapa had a sister named Holika who had the boon that she would not be burnt by fire. She was asked to sit inside a fire and take Prahlad in her lap. She did her brother's bidding. Holika, however, died and Prahlad survived.

All the people in his kingdom were greatly distressed and great cries went up to God, for succour from the hands of the demon Hiranakashyapa. Vishnu, in order to save his own creation from the evils leashed out by the demon king, took the form of a Narsimha Avatar. In this form he was half-man and half-lion—neither man nor beast. He then ascended upon Hiranakashyapa and at twilight when it was neither day nor night, picked him up on his lap which was neither the ground nor the sky, sat in the door way which was neither inside a house nor outside of it, and tore him apart with his lion claws, i.e. without using any weapon. Thus, God in his ingenuity destroyed Hiranakashyapa.

Narsimha Avatar is not much worshipped in idol form but pictorial representations are quite common. He is depicted tearing Hiranakashyapa's stomach apart with his claws. Sometimes an idol representation of Narsimha Avatar is put along

with other idols in a large temple. Worship to him is offered, as to Vishnu, as a preserver and guardian of faith and goodness. The myth of Hiranakashyapa is a telling pointer to the oft-repeated truism that evil will ultimately meet with retribution, no matter how cleverly the evil-doer tries to dodge his fate.

KALKI

Kalki is the last incarnation of Bhagwan Vishnu, yet to arrive. Kalki is associated with the *Kalyug*, the phase through which we are passing now. In this *yug* evil is supposed to reach a peak. There is dishonour of the Brahmin and the cow; women lose their virtue; falsehood dominates over truth; and evil in general dominates over good.

Kalki is not a God that is usually worshipped. There is a section of people who are trying to popularize a Kalki movement. In Delhi there is a Kalki Mandal which was established by one Maharishi Bal Mukund. This Mandal propagates the idea that God will soon incarnate himself in the form of Kalki and all those who believe in him will be saved, and all evil-doers and disbelievers would be eliminated.

Kalki will descend on the earth riding a horse and a swash-buckling sword in hand. His sword will decapitate the sinners in their millions and only the virtuous will be allowed to survive. The plaints and cries of the sinners will at that time go unheeded.

The coming of Kalki would herald the end of *Kalyug* and the coming of *Satyug* which is marked by the dominance of good over evil. One Kalki temple has also been established recently, showing Kalki as a principal deity, mounted on a horse, holding a naked upraised sword in one hand and weilding several other weapons. The propagators of this movement try to attribute its origin to Sri Rama Krishna Paramhansa.

In Old Delhi, some thirty years ago, there was a person who used to roam the streets with a 'club' on his shoulders, proclaiming the coming of Kalki and the end of this world. A photograph of both this person as well as of Shri Bal Mukund are also placed in the Kalki temple.

The attempts to add another deity to the already existing ones is a pointer to the emergence of fresh problems and anxieties in today's world and the inadequacy of already existing divinty to cope with them. The rise and fall of divine forms, according to the needs of the time, are best exemplied by the example of two goddesses, namely the goddess river Jamuna, and Sitala Mata, the goddess of small-pox. At a time when sporadic floods were very common in the Jamuna, she was a popular goddess. Today her idol lies neglected in temples with hardly any offerings. Similarly with the eradication of small-pox the worship of Sitala Mata, once a very powerful deity, has considerably diminished. This adaptability, perhaps, accounts for the persistance of Hinduism and its idol worship. Hinduism is called *Sanatan Dharma* or the eternal faith, for the principals of divinity survive any change in forms of divinity.

CHAPTER FOUR

FORMS OF PRAYER

Most votaries do not go and worship god as and when they require something. They build up a repositary of good rapport with the gods and when they particularly want something, go to him, say a short prayer and ask him for it. The manner of worship of gods differs in precise details, but there are certain general points that need to be made.

An *aarti* is often performed in Hindu worship. A *thali* or tray is taken; a *diya* (an earthen lamp) with a cotton wick burning in ghee, or burning camphor tablets, are placed on the tray. Other ritual items are also put. These are primarily of two colours, white and red-brown-yellow. Most items are sweet-smelling and things that are good to eat. Black items are used when there are inauspicious signs or in magic.

The white items are: water, rice grains (wheat grains are used when the occasion is inauspicious), milk, coconut, fruits, white flowers, curds, ghee, *burfee* (a preparation of milk and sugar), *kheer* (a preparation of milk, sugar and rice), white sugar, and silver.

The brown-red-yellow items are: red and yellow flowers and petals, lentils, fruits, *sindoor* (vermillion), turmeric, honey, *gur* (jaggery), brown sugar, *puree* (unleavened fried bread), *halva* (a preparation of semolina sugar and water), *bundi* (a preparation from gram flour and sugar fried in ghee) and gold. A white, saffron and red cotton thread is often used and is called *mouli*. Green leaves of the tulsi plant and betel leaves are used and so is green grass. The last-named symbolises mental troubles.

The *aarti* tray with the burning *diya* is moved before the object of veneration in a circular manner, making a sort of halo of light around the image. The palms may be held over the aarti *diya* tray and then moved over the eyes and head.

There are also set manners of approaching each one of the

gods. The procedure for a puja, ideally speaking, involves first a process of self-cleansing and keeping a fast after which *puja* can be performed. Fasting may accompany any prayers.

The morning *puja* is quite commonplace. The first task is to be up, very early in the morning, even as early as 4 O'clock (women get up before men and daughters-in-law are expected to be up and about before other women). First, one must clean oneself; defecate, rinse the mouth, clean the teeth and bathe. Only after these acts of self-cleansing one can do *puja*. Everybody in the house may do it or just one member, usually the male head of the family.

The *puja* is of different kinds depending upon the gods or godesses one wants to propitiate. For instance, if a person generally prays to Lord Shiva, prayers will be offered to Ganesh and then to Shiva; and if the day happens to be a Tuesday, the *Hanuman Chalisa* (Hanuman's 40 lines) may also be read and the *puja* may end with the Vishnu-Laxmi *aarti*.

The process of *puja* may begin and end with the ringing of the bell and even during the *puja*, the bell may be rung continuously. Incense wicks called *dhoop* or a *diya* may be lit.

To worship, a person may read from any number of prayer-books available in praise of different gods and goddesses. These boo ks, viz. Hanuman Chalisa, Durga Chalisa, Ramayana and Bhagwad Gita, may be read in homes. Two holy texts, namely the Mahabharta and Shiva Purana are specifically not read in homes. The Shiva Purana is read in the temple or out in the garden.

The prayers may take the form of continuously repeating the name of gods, e.g. Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama; Sita Rama, Sita Rama; Radhey Krishna, Radhey Krishna, Radhey Krishna; Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Hare; Hare Rama, Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, Hare Krishna, and so on and so fourth.

There are a few well-known *mantras* too, e.g. "Om Namo Shivaya" "Om Harin Kalin Chawalai Mundai Wiche". The most well-known and often chanted *mantra* is the *Gayatri mantra*:—*Om bhur bhuwah suhah, taswit vareyniyam, bhargo devasya dhi mayi, diyo yo na pracho diyana.* These *mantras* or names are to be said a certain number of times, usually 108 or

a multiple thereof. The rosary (with 108 beads) is useful for counting as one *mantra* is said over one bead and one bead on the rosary is moved inwards with the thumb. The rosay is always held in the right hand. The one bead on the top that divides the 108 beads marks a point for beginning and end; it is not touched while praying.

Pictures of gods and goddesses may be objects of worship at home. Sometimes idols may be used. Out of the pantheon of gods and goddesses, an individual chooses one god or goddess for special devotion; that god is one's *Ishta Devta*. If one god is especially worshipped by the whole household then it is called as *Grih Devta*. The *Ishta Devta* or *Grih Devta* is given prime importance in the mini-temple at home.

In rich families, a small temple-like arrangement may be made, called the *Thakur Devta* meaning master-god. Amongst other images it includes the image of the *Ishta Devta* of the person who has installed it.

Many people have an *Ishta Devta*. Shiva, Rama, Krishna and Hanuman are the gods who are often Ishta Devtas. The frequency of people who accept Hanuman as their *Ishta Devta* is quite out of proportion to his geneological connection with any of the gods of the Hindu trinity or his position in the hierarchy of gods. In fact he ranks equal with Rama, Krishna and Shiva in any popularity measure.

When an individual takes on an *Ishta Devta* he does not stop worshipping the other gods and goddesses, and the *Ishta Devta* is not the sole god for him. It only means that a person singles out one particular god for special devotion and in return he asks this particular god for favours; it is in him that he reposits his fortunes and to him that he expresses his desires. He may have, in the past, had a good experience with the particular god. The god may have helped him more often or when desperately in need.

The *Thakur Devta* is installed in the house by proper ceremony conducted by the pundit and it becomes in some ways a part of the household. It is necessary, from now on, to perform worship to the *Thakur Devta* every morning. It is necessary to cook some meal every meal-time, day in and day out, without missing any meal. God must be fed every meal-time and no meal can be skipped. The food cannot be brought from the

market or somebody's else's house to be given to him.

Maintaining a *Thakur Devta* at home is a rigorous affair. Skipping a meal for the *Thakur Devta* or failing to perform *puja* entails *pap*, and so a *Thakur Devta* is established only after due consideration.

When members of a family must perforce be away from their house for a long time, a way out of the situation is to request some other household to take charge of the *Thakur Devta* during the period of absence. The *Thakur Devta* is then, with due ceremony, taken and installed in the new house.

TEMPLES

A visit to a temple, along with other ritual activities, is a must. Gods in temples are separated in time and space, best suited to contemplation and veneration. Temples offer a separate-ideal-complete environment without mundane encumberances. Further, temples are also important for religious functionaries; the *pujaris* often live in them.

Temples, especially the big and prestigious ones, are built at an elevation from the ground, sometimes as high as 18 to 20 feet above the ground-level. In the centre is a rectangular courtyard and on three sides there are the images of various gods and goddesses. The principal image occupies a prominent place and is usually the largest image in the temple. It is after this principal deity that the temple is usually named. Small temples do not have names but they may be referred to in terms of the place that they are located in. One temple is named "Chaurasi Ghanta" mandir or the temple of Eighty-four bells. This temple had at one time 84 bells hanging from its ceiling. Temple names usually go after the prominent image of the god installed therein. Names then go as Hanuman Mandir, Gauri Shankar Mandir or Lakshmi Narain Mandir.

The temple structure is topped by a dome which is pyramidical in shape (except that there are no sharp corners) unlike the domes of mosques and gurudwaras which are largely round in shape. Emerging from the dome is a brass metal trident or a point and sometimes an electric bulb is alight on top. Apart from the highest central dome, there are other domes of lesser height but similar in shape as the central dome. Sometimes the

domes are decorated with elephants, chains, and bells done in masonary work over them. In fact, the bell is unique to Hindu form of worship.

The images of the gods are usually put against the wall so that devotees do not generally go to the back of the image. In large temples, however, the image may be in a large room with the idol at the centre. There is then a gallery running outside and around the room; and in the two side walls as well as the wall at the back of the idol, a small peep hole may be made through which a person can see the idol. In this gallery, the worshippers usually circulate in a clockwise direction.

Just outside the temple gate there is a place where shoes are to be taken off, and from a water tap devotees may wash their hands and feet before going to worship. A votary may take inside simple wherewithal of worships sold in the neighbourhood of the temple such as flowers, especially red rose petals, garlands of roses or white jasmine buds, marigolds and sweet meats, *diyas* and camphor tablets.

Inside the temple one can join in religious singing accompanied by musical instruments. The instruments include harmonium, drums, long forceps like metal clappers, saucer-size cimbals.

Often *pujaris* lock and open the temple at fixed times, opening them at 4.00 A.M. and closing them at 11.00 A.M., then again opening at 4.00 P.M. and closing at 10.00 P.M. when *pujari* draws a curtain across the image of the god; it is said that the god has gone to sleep. After the devotees have all left, the *pujari* will clean the idol, remove any precious ornaments and may lay out a doll-size bed for the god. Images of gods have also to be cleaned with loving care by wiping with a cloth. Clothes worn by gods must be changed at least once or more than once a year.

The *pujari* sitting before the idols of gods has his own paraphernalia—water in metal glass and metal tea spoon, incense and *diyas* and *charnamrit*, i.e. a mixture of milk, curd, sugar and leaves of the *tulsi* plant, and some sweet meats. He sits before the garlanded image of the god and is praying and watching over the idols.

Visitors come, offer money (usually coins of small denominations, say 5 or 10 paise), and may prostrate themselves lying on

their belly, hands and legs stretched straight. This is called *dandavat pranam*. A simple *pranam* would be one in which the devotee folds his hands in a *namaskar*, then goes down on his knees and touches his forehead to the ground. Or, he may only fold his hands in *namaskar* and bow his head. It means that the devotee offers himself in mind, body and wealth to the god. Sometimes, devotees bring a metal plate in which is placed flower, petals, *patashe*, camphor tablets, some coins and *prasad* as sweetmeats and hands them over to the *pujari*.

Once the devotee has shown his veneration in any of the above mentioned manner, the *pujari* may bestow the blessings of the god in one of the following manner. The camphor tablets may be lit and moved around the image of the god while the *pujari* may ring the bell and say *mantras*. The rose petals may be showered on the image of the god and the coins placed at his feet. A bit of *prasad* may be applied to his mouth and some kept back and the rest given back to the devotee. The *pujari* may annoint the devotee, he may offer the devotee *charnamrit* or just (holy) water by placing some in the cup of his right hand. Further, he may give the devotee some *prasad* of his own. Thus, there can be much variability in the interaction between a votary and a *pujari*. The more the interaction the greater is thought to be the communion with the gods; and many people complain about *pujaris* who discriminate in favour of devotees who had in the first place made large offerings.

Receiving the blessings of the gods through the *pujari* is not the only important reason for attending the temple, for going to a temple gives its own peace of mind and well being. The temple environment is very satisfying to the senses. Other social activities are tabooed in the temple and therefore it is a diversion from the vexations of everyday life. There is a particular taboo against eating inside the temple unless it is the Brahmins who are being fed. All sexual intentions in the temple premises are also forbidden.

The specific ways, in which a particular divine being is worshipped, includes the special ritual items that are used in the ritual, the specific myths or stories told, the specific *aarti*, and the special days marked for him.

VISHNU

Homage is paid to Vishnu by placing before him flowers and sweets and blowing of the conch shell. A song of prayers is sung for Vishnu and it is called the Aarti of Sri Vishnu-Lakshmi and can be sung at the and of any ritual event that laymen conduct by themselves.

Aarti of Shri Vishnu-Lakshmi

Om, praised be the Lord of the worlds, Hare
Hari Om, praised be the Lord of the worlds
The misfortunes of his devotees, he banishes in a moment, Om,
Praised be the Lord of the worlds, Hare
Whoever remembers him gets his rewards, the sorrow of one's mind is dispelled
The household is filled with wealth and prosperity, the body is rid of all its maladies
Om, praised be the Lord of the worlds, Hare
You are my mother and father, to who else should I go for shelter,
There is no one else but you, from whom I can expect something
Om, Praised be the Lord of the worlds, Hare
You are the complete master of the souls, you know every thing that is hidden in the mind
You are beyond Brahma, You are the most exalted God, You are master of everyone
Om, praised be the Lord of the worlds, Hare
You are the ocean of mercy, You are the keeper,
I am your servant, you are my master
Have compassion on me, O giver
Om, praised be the Lord of the worlds, Hare
You are One who is hidden, the Lord of all life
How can I meet you O merciful, I am but of lowly mind
Om, praised be the Lord of the worlds, Hare
The friend of the poor, the expeller of sorrows, you are my keeper
Extend your hand of compassion, I am at your feet
Om, praised by the Lord of the worlds, Hare
Absorb all sin, O Lord, increase my devotion and piety, the serving of the saints

Numerous ritual days are in some way or the other dedicated to Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, which includes their respective birthdays. Praise of the Lords is achieved by reading the Ramayana and Gita. The eleventh day of every lunar month is



Vishnu—Vishnu, crowned, bejewelled and garlanded has four hands. The front hand on the left has a mace, and the hand behind this one has a *Sudarshan Chakra*. On the right side, the hand at the back holds a conch shell. Standing on the two sides of Vishnu are his devotees. Just in front of Vishnu, on the left side, a householder couple are sitting and a Brahmin priest is sitting opposite them. They are performing the ritual of worship of Satya Narayan or Vishnu. The two trays between them contain the paraphernalia of worship. In front of the Brahmin priest is a religious text called the Satya Narayan Katha.

called *Ekadashi* and is the day of prayer to Vishnu and recital of Satya Narain Katha.

Vishnu rides the Garud, a bird identified as an eagle. The bird is connected with royalty. It is used as a messenger and being bird of prey it is used by kings in their hunts. Just as Vishnu has control over its carrier, those who worship and identify with Vishnu must have control over the characteristics that are represented in the bird. Those who see an antithesis between Vishnu and Shiva, say that Vishnu rides the eagle as it can attack and kill the king cobra associated with Shiva.

SHIVA

Certain important life giving items are given to the Shiva Lingam. Water runs over it from a copper vessel and devotees also bring water in *lotas* and pour it over the Lingam. For showing greater devotion, water is replaced by milk. Another thing that is similarly life-giving is the fruit of the *bilva* tree. This fruit is sometimes the sole basis of subsistance for sages who inhabit the deep jungles. The sages may also subsist on opium, which is also an offering to the Lingam. Water, milk, fruit and leaves of *bilva* tree, sweets, flowers and seasonal fruits, a *diya* and, on important ritual days, opium is offered to Shiva.

Once a ritual presentation is made to the Lingam, the devotees cannot partake of it. It is only the priest who can eat them. They are incomestible as far as the devotee is concerned. The water poured over the Lingam also become charged. It is not allowed to flow in an open drain. Often, the Lingam is built over a well, so that the water flows into the well.

Wild flowering plants, such as latex and prickly pear are considered to be poisonous, but with medicinal properties, can be given to the *Chaumukha Shiva*. Once this is done, the fidel go round the image. Some temples prevent anyone from circling the Lingam by placing it against a wall. The circumbulation of the idol goes to say, "This is all that there is" or "This is everything" or "It is all".

A unique aspect of Lingam worship is by inverting normal procedure. It is popularly said that so and so person goes to Shiva when he wants something and, instead of affirming his

loyalty and honouring the god, he abuses him instead and even threatens to beat him with a stick. Shiva listens to this votary because at least he is fidel enough to really believe in him, even if it is to abuse.

Shiva is approached in varying moods, from complete devotion, supplication, atonement, resignation or even anger. A woman once went around the Lingam with her back towards it. The officiating priest saw her do it and protested but she had already completed her round. This form of ritual expresses very strong wishes of the devotee, going to the extent of chastising the god, if he fails to fulfil wishes.

Anthropomorphic Shiva, where he is always with Parvati, is honoured in a manner quite different from the Lingam. Only flowers, sweets and incense may be set before him and the devotees can eat the sweets later. The anthropomorphic Shiva differs from the Lingam in as much as one cannot offer water or wild flowering plants, nor can one go around it.

When praying to Shiva a well known *mantra* is "Om Namo Shivaye" which means Shiva is the Supreme God. His *aarti* or song of praise and prayer also reflects the same sentiments.

In veneration of the Lord, the Shiva Purana may be read. It is, however, read out in the garden or in a temple but never at home. The Shiva *aarti* is often sung in praise of him.

Aarti of Shiva

Praised be Shiva, the form of Om
Brahma, Vishnu, Eternal Shiva with Parvati and the Ganges
One with one eye, with four eyes, with five eyes; Rule
Seated on a swan, an eagle and the bull as the vahans; look beautiful

The one with two arms, the one with four arms and the one with ten arms; look beautiful

All the three forms look beautiful and capture the hearts of the people of the three worlds

Wearing white clothes, yellow clothes and clothes of tiger skin on their bodies

With their followers, the sons of Brahma, then tire creation and Shiva faithfuls

Wearing a luminous (jewel) garland, a garland of flowers and a garland of human skulls

Chandan, the perfume of the musk deer, and the moon are auspicious on your foreheads
In your hand you carry the *karmandal* (gourd container), *chakra* and the trishul
The maker of the world, the preserver of the world you are, the destroyer of the world,
Sixty four *Yogis* sing songs and Bharion dances
The *mridang* (drum) is played and also the *damru* (rattle drum)
The husbands of Savitri, Lakshmi and the one with Sri Parvati
Your half form is Gayatri and your head is graced by the Ganga.
In Kashi you live as Vishwanath with Nandi (bull) who is celibate
Every morning people make offerings, your power is great
Brahma, Vishnu, eternal Shiva, one should know are inseparable
In the letter of 'Om' these three are one
Whosoever does the 'aarti' of the Lord with three characters
Says Shivananda Swami, will get his heart's desires.

Shiva's carrier is the bull, characterised as a verocious eater, one that is quick to anger and with a strong libido. Shiva controls the bull and so must a Shiva devotee control those drives characterised by the bull.

DURGA

Durga accepts, red rose petals, fruits, *patashe*, *roli*, *rice* and *halwa*. Durga is also offered gur (jaggery), *chana* (gram) *sindoor* (vermillion) and a red *chunni*. The last-named is a long cloth used by women to cover their heads. Married women use a red-coloured *chunni*.

A popular form of devotion to Durga is the all-night vigil in the praise of the Mother. In these *jagrans*, reference is often made to her shrine at Vaishno Devi. The *jagran* can take place inside a temple or in any park or open space. A road may be blocked for the purpose.

A stage is usually put up on which an image of Durga, in cardboard or in cloth is, put up. There is also a *shamiana* and lighting arrangement where the people, sit. Loudspeakers are often used.

The *jagrans* are sung by professional groups called *mandalis*, the public normally sings each line after the singers or they take up a refrain.

The special thing about a *jagran* is that a flame is lit at the beginning around, say, 7 or 8 O' clock, being constantly fed with ghee (clarified butter). It is extinguished when the *jagran* comes to an end in the morning, as the stars disappear in the morning sky.

Members of the 'mandalis' can be of low caste, harijan or sometimes even Muslim singers. The singers on the dais can object to people talking, may ask them to sing loudly, or clap, or join in more vigorously. Sometimes songs are sung to the tune of popular film songs. Religious songs from films are also lifted.

No *jagran* is complete without the story of Taravati. In traditional times the *jagran* consisted of singing of *chhand* (couplets) and telling the story of Taravati. This is not the scriptural story of Raja Dushyanta but a folktale from the Punjab.

There was once a king Iswashu. He had no issues and he would ask *Ma* (Bhagwati) for children. He would say "I have got a kingdom and all the pleasures, but no children", and he used to perform *yajnas*.

One day, *Ma* expressed her happiness at the king's penance (*tapasya*), and the king replied, "you know what I want". *Ma* told him to go; and after six months a daughter, more beautiful than the moon was born to him. A pundit was called in, he consulted the Brighu Samhita Grantha (which contains information on the past life and future of an individual) and he said that she will go (marry) into a high lineage. "This daughter", the pundit told the king, "will glorify your name and she will shine like a star".

One year later, another daughter was born to the king but this girl was dark. The king grew suspicious and consulted the pundit who opined that this daughter would bring disgrace upon the king's name. The reason was a past deed of the king.

One day, when the king was out hunting, and as it was getting dark, his minister happened to kill the *kapila* cow; consequently he had expelled the minister. The minister, in order to take revenge, killed a poisonous snake and took it to the royal kitchen, where *kheer* was being prepared and he put the snake in the *kheer*.

The *kapila* cow had been reborn as a lizard and was in the royal kitchen. On seeing this, she dropped herself into the *kheer*. On finding the lizard in the *kheer*, it was not consumed and therefore, the life of the *sadhus* (holy men who would have eaten from the royal kitchen) was saved.

The king had been granted a boon that whatever he said would come true. When he went and saw the *kheer* he cursed the lizard, to a lowly position. However, when the *kheer* was being thrown away the snake was noticed and the king realized what had actually occurred. It was this lizard who was now reborn in the Raja's house. This second daughter was named Rukmani.

The king decided to get rid of this girl and called for a *pitara* (box), filled it with gold and diamonds, put the little baby inside it and floated the *pitara* in a river. He thought, whoso-ever picks up the *pitara* will look after her. The daughter floated down to the city of Raja Harishchandra. A pundit saw the gold *pitara* and asked a *bhil* (tribal) to bring it, saying that I will take the outside and you take whatever is inside, and the *bhil* obeyed him.

The *bhil* went home and opened the box and saw the girl. He thought, "I am an old man now. I wanted a child when I was young, how will I bring her up now?" But due to God's grace the mother (the bhil's wife) got milk in her breasts. Thus the two daughters grew up in different households.

When Tara was twenty years old, she was married to Raja Harishchandra but the *bhil* (tribal) married the girl at a Bhangan's (sweepress's). Rukmini's mother-in-law was a sweepress in the Royal Palace. When Rukmani went to sweep the palace, she saw Tara (her sister, a devotee of *Ma*) and the *jagran* that was going on in her house. Rukmani sat down to hear the *jagran*.

In the morning at around 4 A.M., the *jagran* came to an end (it should come to an end with the fading stars). Tara saw a girl sleeping at the threshold of the door and asked her who she was. The girl replied, "I am the sweepress" and further enquired what was going on inside. On being told by Tara that it was a *jagran*, the girl asked her if it could also be done at her house and Tara answered 'yes'.

The girl Rukmani said that if she begot a son she would have a *jagran*. Tara told her that if she took rice and *roli* and grains, and distributed a little of each to devotees, whoever accepted it, would come to her *jagran*. Rukmani brought rice and *roli* and gave it to Tara. The barber saw this and, in the morning while shaving the king, he applied polluted water to the king's face and told him about his wife's plans to go to the *jagran*.

At night, the king cut his thumb with a knife and put salt to it, so that he did not sleep, and then told his queen to put his head in her lap and try to put him to sleep. The queen Tara thought of her commitment to go to the *jagran* but also of her husband's kingly ego (stubborness). The king, nevertheless, fell off to sleep.

The gates were closed; so Tara with the help of her saree descended the wall. On the way to Rukmani's house, thieves wanted to loot her, but they soon became blind, but when they desisted they got back their eyes. Then the queen's saree got stuck in thorns, but she pulled it loose and she reached the *jagran* and there got involved in the sacrifice.

The *jagran* that was taking place was of Kali, not of Durga. In *Satyug*, people used to offer their heads to Kali and there is the story of the sage who, while climbing the 101 steps leading to the image of Kali, at each step, he struck off his own head as an offering to Kali, but which by the next step was miraculously replaced. In later times people became scared of offering their heads and began to perform animal sacrifice, and later on people became even more scared and, therefore, from her powers she gave them the coconut as an appropriate sacrificial offering. It has two eyes like the face and the coconut therefore is acceptable.

In the meanwhile Raja Harishchandra got up and went out to look for his wife where he met the thieves who told him their story. The king then followed the track of fallen jewellery and the torn saree. The king reached Rukmani's house and made a hole in the wall with his sword and what did he see but Tara accepting the *prasad* of meat and liquor. The king got very angry, said, "You, Tara, are a devotee of Vishnu." Tara replied that she did not know what this (*prasad*) was. The king wanted to see for himself and looked into the container. The head of

the goat became a coconut and the other parts of the goat became the dried dates and *makhanae* (seeds taken from the lotus plant). At this moment *prasad* was distributed amongst the devotees in the congregation.

The tale goes on, the king told the queen that she was a sorceress. She replied that all that was the doing of *Ma* and not her.

The king then proposed to sacrifice his best blue horse and cook him for *prasad*. The queen pleaded with him not to test *Ma*. The king, however, ordered his blue horse and his son to be killed and cooked in different vessels. Usually the process of cooking took seven days but this time miraculously it took only one day. The king partook of the *prasad* and his son's little finger (with the ring) came in his mouth and at that he regretted his decision. The king began to beg of *Ma*. *Ma* told him to call out for his son. The king called out, "Rohtash!" and the son appeared and said, "Just as you were killing me, *Vaishno Ma* picked me up and gave me toys to play and I was happily playing; why did you call me?" The blue horse also reappeared and then *Ma* stated, "Rukmani is the real sister of the queen Tara and I wanted to bring them together and so I did all this." When the cooking vessels were opened (again) the white child had become *halwa*, the blue horse had turned black gram (*chana*) and both were clinging to each other. From that time onwards *halwa* and *chana* is offered to *Ma* as *prasad*.

Some of the songs that are sung in praise of the goddess are as follows:

Song I

You called me one with the Tiger, I am coming,
I am coming, one with the Tiger,
One with the matted locks, one with the Tiger
One who lives on the mountains and in the temples
Everybody in the world is like a nomad whose goal is your threshold,

One with the Tiger
You brought light into my mind
On your way I found my companions
I hardly opened my mouth to ask for a boon
But I got everything before I could ask,

One with the Tiger
Who is a king and who is beggar?
All who worship you are alike
Everyone is your worshipper
O lighted one, the one who lives on the mountain
Everyone, say with love, praised be the Mother
The Mother of the true light be praised
You called me, the lighted one, you called me,
I am coming, I am coming, the one with the Tiger
Say loudly, praised be the one with the Tiger
Everybody in the world is a nomad
Everyone's goal is your threshold,
The mountains are high, the way is long
O lighted one, O one with the Tiger,
Say with love, everyone say, say loudly praise be to *Ma*.

Song II

Ambe will deliver you
The Mother will deliver you
Kali Mother's flame is lit
Our fate is also bright with it
Whosoever will come to the Mother's threshold
The mother will deliver him
Ambe will deliver you
At the threshold of the mother; all the gods have collected
Shankar is playing his rattle
Mahesh is ordaining everyone's welfare
Narada is playing his flute
Paan, *supari*, sweets and coconuts,
Soft flowers have been made as offerings
There is resonance of the conch shell
No sin can ever come where the Mother's flame is lit
All sins run away far from where the Mother's flame is lit
All sorrows run away far from where the Mother's flame is lit
Brahma, Mahesh, Vishnu bow down where the Mother's flame is lit.
The Mother's flame is reincarnation of God
It has brought in the morning
Akbar tested the Mother's flame
He brought a canal upto Jwalaji
Along with it he offered a golden umbrella
Where the Mother's flame is lit
Whosoever bows down before the flame
The Mother of the flame, the Mother who lives on the mountains

SONG III

The Ambe Mother is sitting on the Tiger
Pay homage to the Mother
She will accomplish all your work
Pay homage to the Mother
Praised be the Mother
She grants him all the boons
Who pays homage to her
She can change one's fate
Such is the Mother Jagadambe
She will accomplish all your work
If you worship her without self-interest
Praised be the Mother, praised, praised
The beautiful, golden bodied one
Who sits upon the Tiger
Praised be the Mother, praised, praised...
The sweet tunes of the drum are playing
Lower your heads in homage
She will accomplish all your work...
I am not adequate to brighten up your abode
The Ambe Mother who sits on the Tiger
Pay homage to the Mother.

SONG IV

The Mother will deliver me...say loudly
Praised be, O queen
Radha loved
Gauri loved
Ravana loved
Shankar loved
It is love that makes you human
But when it goes beyond control
It makes you a monster
Who says that one cannot get glimpse of the Mother...
If you say it, then there is no incarnation of Narsimha
I have come to your court, O Mother
Keep me under the shade of your feet
You only have brought me to your court
To whom should I tell the tale of my woes
I have no shelter in this world
Shed your mercy and your benevolence on me.
I will also be delivered from this sinful world
I have heard that you have delivered millions

I have seen that you have delivered millions
Even the sinful finds deliverance at your threshold
You tell me so that I should find deliverence
In the blessings of this world...
Your court amongst courts is exalted
In your court all boons are granted

The worship ends with a Durga Mantra and distribution of *prasad*. The tray in which the *diya* of the vigil was lit is passed around. Devotees pass their palms over the flame, press them to their eyes and move them over their head.

Durga, rides a tiger or a lion. And as she controls his ferociousness and anger, her votaries must not feel scared and must remain calm in all circumstances.

KALI

The rituals of supplication to the goddess Kali usually takes the form of sacrifice..The dearer the offering the more efficace is the sacrifice. Sacrificial objects include, the fowl, the goat and even humans, including infants. Kali demands blood and liquor which goes well with meat. Any way it is no sin to give back (by sacrifice) an infant to (its) mother (goddess). Once the subscription has been made in the name of Kali and symbolically given to her the devotees may each eat some of it. except when it is human.

Kali worship remains for many a private and secret affair even if Kali is not always approached for personal wants; for instance, she may be propitiated in times of severe draught or famine, or in times of war.

LAKSHMI

Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and so she is not prayed to, all alone. It would be dangerous to pursue her, irrespective of all other considerations, like a crook does. Along with her, either tributes are paid to Ganesh, or to Ganesh as well as Saraswati. The festival of Diwali falling every year in the months of October-November is especially dedicated to her. The day is commemorated to Rama as he returned to his kingdom of Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile. Diwali, as the festival of Lakshmi, is the darkest night of all nights in the year and the

night of thieves who pursue wealth without any other considerations.

Her *vahana* or carrier is the white owl, known for its anti-social propensities. It awakens at night and sleeps during the day. It is associated with absence of human feelings or social environments, and stupidity. The most stupid person is called, not just an owl but a wooden owl.

GANESH

The portly Ganesh receives his dues whenever Shiva and Parvati is prayed to as well as at beginning of all that goes by homage to the gods. His *aarti* is even otherwise quite popular.

Aarti of Sri Ganesh

Praise Ganesh, Praise Ganesh, Praise Ganesh, the Lord
Whose mother is Paravti, whose father is Mahadev
We make offering of flowers of garlands and of fruits.
Oblations of *laddu* are offered and saints offer their services
He has one tusk, the merciful, and four arms
His forehead is decorated with *sindoor* and he rides a mouse
He gives eyes to the blind and form to the leper
To the barren he gives son and to the poor wealth
Sweets are offered as oblations and saints offer their services
Offerings are made of flowers, of garlands of fruits
Save the grace of the poor, O son of Shambhu (Shiva)
Fulfil the desires of our heart
We speak in adoration.

Ganesh rides the lowly rat, known for its capacity to breed prolifically, to get at food in the most inaccessible places, and to move about in the most precocious fashion. Humans must control (ride) the rat in themselves.

HANUMAN

Hanumana derives great adoration and respect as a faithful servant of Lord Rama. He is prayed to for relief from disease and for inner strength. Prayers to Hanuman keeps ghost and evil spirits away. Any evil that might plague nature may be warded off by Hanuman. In reverence a *prasad* of *burfee*

is touched to his mouth and some strewn at his feet, and silver leafs are stuck on to him.

Men fast on Tuesday in his honour but women are not supposed to fast for him, if they want to do so, they can do so after their menopause. Hanuman is a bachelor—a *brahmachari* Women, however, do view him as a protector. Monkeys may be fed horsegram and peanuts, as Hanuman was a monkey (langoor). The best way to pray to him is by reading of the Hanuman Chalisa and the Ramayana. The Hanuman Chalisa (Hanuman's forty lines) reads as follows.

Hanuman Chalisa

Considering myself to be ignorant, I worship you, son of Pawan,
Give me strength, wisdom and knowledge and relieve me of ills and misfortunes.

Glory to Hanuman who is the beholder (ocean) of knowledge and virtues.

Glory to the king of monkeys who is the light of the three worlds
The messenger of Rama and possessor of strength,
My obeisance to son of Anjani and Pawan
Great warrior and possessor of great strength, with body like thunder

The dispeller of evil and supporter of goodness
Whose colour is like gold and who is adorned and handsome.
He has curly hair and earings in his ears
In his hands is a flag and a thunderbolt.
The sacred thread adorns his shoulders,
The worshipper of Shankar and the like (son) of a lion
You swallowed the sun which is at a distance of a thousand *yojanas*

Thinking it to be a sweet fruit
Taking the finger-ring of the Lord in your mouth
It is no wonder that you jumped over the sea
All the difficult tasks in this world are conquered by you
At your instance they become easy
You are the watchman at the gates of Rama
Without your permission no one can enter
All good things take shelter with you
When you are the keeper, nobody need fear
Your brightness (strength) is contained by you also
The three worlds shiver when you roar
No *bhoot* or *pisach* (evil spirits) can come near
When a person takes the name of Mahavira
Destroys disease and relieves all pain

When the name of Hanuman is continuously chanted.
Hanuman rescues from all troubles
When his words are remembered in anybody's heart
Rama, the practitioner of great penance, is the king above all
Whose works you have accomplished so well,
Whomsoever brings his desires to you
He achieves forever the fruits of life
Your influence is dominant in all the four *yugs*
Your light is illuminating the whole world
The scourage of demons and the darling of Rama
You are the keeper of godly men
The giver of eight *siddhi* and nine *nidhis*
Whose valour and strength the whole world worships
Learned, wise and possessor of great knowledge
Who is eager to do all tasks given by Sri Rama
Who is eager to listen to the tales of Rama
In whose heart live Rama, Sita and Lakshman
Who took a very tiny form to enter and see Lanka
Who transformed himself to frightening proportions in order to burn it down
Who took Bhim (very strong) like form to kill the Asura (demons)
Who accomplished the task of Rama
Who brought Sanjivani (life giving herb) to bring Lakshman to life
Whom Raghvir joyously embraced
Whose praises were sung by Raghupati
That you are my brother as dear to me as Bharat
A thousand folk will sing your praises
Saying this Sripati embraced him
Yama and Kuber are the sentries; the poets and wisemen also cannot describe they splendour
You did great favour to Sugreev by arranging his meetings with Rama and giving him back his throne
Your Mantra (that of worship of Rama) was accepted by Vibhishan who was then made the king of Lanka as the whole world knows
Such a boon was given by Mother Janaki—
The knowledge of Rama will remain with you
You will always remain the slave of Rama,
Whosoever sings your praise will achieve Rama
The misery of every rebirth will be relieved
At the end of your life you will go to Rama's abode
Where you will be born as the follower of Hari
There is no need to bring other gods into your heart
Hanuman is enough to give you all the *sukh* (peace and prosperity)

Your troubles are gone and all pain disappears
Whosoever remembers Hanuman the brave and valient
Hail Hanuman
Please bless me like a Guru
Whosoever reads this text seven times is relieved of all shackles and attains great peace and well-being

Whosoever reads this Hanuman Chalisa
Tulsidas is always the servant of God
O Lord, please make your abode in my heart.

Tuesday is the day of offering him *prasad* and Saturday for praying to him, as Tuesday is the day of his victory and Saturday his birthday. His birthday is celebrated as Hanuman Jayanti, in April every year.

GRAHAS

The *grahas* are propitiated in all ceremonies connected with life cycle. The sun-god is not asked any particular kind of favour. It is a generalised god and is prayed to independently or in association with the *peepal* tree. After the ritual of the *peepal* tree, water from a *lota* is poured. The votary sees the sun through the stream of water. He says: praise be to the sun-devta. The water that is spilled on the ground is touched with the fingers and the fingers then brought to touch the forehead and eyes. Sunday is marked for sun-worship. When the first fruits of the season are brought home, some are sent to the temple as they are a gift of (sun) god.

The moon is not generally worshipped but it finds a place in many a rituals and religious diagrams. The *Shani devta* is a very powerful body, especially as it can bring misfortune over long periods of time, even upto twelve years or more. The *Shani devta* is powerful, especially in his power of doing evil. On Saturday, apart from giving coins and mustard oil to the *Shani* image, hawked on the street as a black iron plate in human contours, standing knees deep in a bucket of oil, people keep a fast for half a day. Only one meal is taken during the day and nothing is either prepared or eaten which has salt in it. Things like curds and sweets are eaten.

When the planets are to be propitiated, the pundit is consulted. He prescribes rituals that are primarily magical in nature.

In one case it was a lot of ghee, red flowers, a coconut, a gold bit, sweet meats, fruits, sacred thread (*janeu*), betel nut and betel leaf—that was given to a Brahmin as gift (*dan*) on a Tuesday morning along with some cash gift (*dakshina*).

The recommendation may not always include that a bit of gold may be given away it may still be an expensive proposition. In another case, the pundit cautioned that from January 1982 *Rahu* was coming and the client concerned was advised to start wearing gold, and white topaz stone after performing a *puja* on a Friday, or alternatively, to wear a diamond of 1¼ *ratti* weight. The diamond must be tested by wrapping it in white cloth, tying the same to the arm like a band and, then, trying to observe the kind of dreams one gets. If the dreams are bad or frightening, the diamond must not be worn.

Sapphire (*nilam*), either blue or white, is another stone with great potential power to bring good or bad luck to the person who wears it. It is usually worn when it is appropriately prescribed from readings of the birth signs of the individual. If worn when it should not be worn, it can bring tremendous bad luck, as it can be worn to great profit, if worn correctly. It is tested by placing it under the willing person's pillow and then seeing if the dreams are good or bad, or one's luck in ths days that follow improves or not.

Some prescriptions can be very exacting such as the one that follows. Take strands of silver threads. Take the milk of a white cow and wash the silver in it. Do a *puja* and wear the silver, it may be taken off after 23 years.

There are other suggestions but they involve worship rather than acts of a magical nature. In the month of *Shrawan*, on 4 consecutive Mondays, offer worship to Lord Shiva in a four-faced temple. Worship the graha (heavenly bodies) according to the reading of your horoscope. If *Shani* of the low (*neech*) type is having the predominant influence on you (and this may be for as long as 7½ to 12 years), a ritual of appeasement has to be performed.

RIVER GODDESSES AND LAKES

The waters of rivers and lakes is holy and is taken home in small containers. It is used to purify or remove any pollution.

The best way to worship them is to take a dip and pray. In the lake at Pushkar, women are expected to bathe in the nude. Rivers and lakes take away all impurities and remove pollution. The ashes from the funeral pyre are floated in the rivers and rituals connected with death are often performed on their banks.

A holy bath in the rivers and lakes is meritorious on ritual or mundane occasions, but most important is the day of Kumbha Mela. Once every twelve years, the most sacred of baths in the rivers is celebrated as the Kumbha Mela. The place is Triveni and hundreds of thousands of devotees congregate to take a holy dip. In between the period of twelve years, each sixth year, is *ardh* Kumbha or half Kumbha, another day for taking a holy dip.

The usual offerings are given to the rivers and it is customary while crossing a river, by boat or by bridge, to throw some coins into it and say "praise by the mother Ganges" or in the name of that river. Long ago, women threw their infants into the waters as a form of propitiation or sacrifice to the mother river.

TREES AND PLANTS

The *bo*-tree is offered water on the day of Bar Amavas, once every year. Other times, people may or may not make any offering to this tree.

Devotions to the *peepal* tree are by way of offering water to it. This apart, a cotton thread is tied three, five or seven times to the tree by walking around it while holding the thread. This ritual assures one the protection of all the forces that inhabit the tree. These include Vishnu, Shiva, ghosts and spirits, both good and evil.

As the nature of divinity is diverse, the most varied oblations are given to *peepal*. A *diya* is lit and kept at its base, and vermillion, sweets and flowers may be offered, as to Vishnu. And leaves and fruits of the *bilva* tree, other wild flowering leaves, prickly pears are put before it, as before Shiva. What is appropriate for ghosts and dead ancestors is also for the *peepal*, like half-cooked lentils and barley, turmeric and the sweet *imarti*.

As the sun rises, reverance is to be shown to the *tulsi* plant.

A woman, especially the eldest among womenfolk in the family, gives water to it and says *namaskar*. In the evening a woman of the household lights a *diya* near it and says *namaskar*. The plant is thus honoured everyday of the week, except on Sundays.

Thursday is marked by worship of the banana plant. On this day women keep a fast and worship the banana plant. They put (all) yellow things like split beans, turmeric, yellow flowers, gram flour, *laddu*, jaggery, etc. on a *thal*, light a *diya*, put all these at the base of the banana plant and recite the story of the fast which goes as follows.

The story of Brihaspatiwar (Thursday) is: Once there was an old woman, who lived with her son and daughter-in-law. Every Thursday the oldwoman used to 'gift' (*dan*) four bananas of gold and would recite the story of Brihaspati.

One day a neighbour said to the daughter-in-law that if her mother-in-law continues to gift away gold bananas as she was doing, they would have no wealth left. The neighbour advised her to tell her mother-in-law to offer silver bananas instead. The daughter-in-law agreed to this and told her mother-in-law, who consented, saying, "I will do as you say". The old woman began to offer silver bananas on every Thursday.

The neighbour could not still rest in peace, so she told the daughter-in-law, "See your mother-in-law offers silver bananas on Thursday; in this way your wealth will be depleted and so you should tell her to offer copper bananas." The daughter-in-law told her mother-in-law accordingly, who in turn began to offer copper bananas.

The neighbour still did not rest and this time she advised the daughter-in-law to advise her mother-in-law to offer iron bananas and when she succeeded in this, she advised the daughter-in-law to tell her mother-in-law to offer four banana fruits. The daughter-in-law told the mother-in-law to offer four banana fruits and the mother-in-law did as much.

The old woman became very poor, and on one Thursday her son beat her up and turned her out of the house. The old woman reached a distant village in penury and without anything to eat.

Lord Vishnu decided to test the old woman and so he asked her about her troubles. See replied, saying, "Today is Thursday and I don't have anything to do *puja* with." Lord Vishnu asked

her what she wanted, to which the old woman replied that she wanted *gur* (jaggery) and *chana* (black grams). Lord Vishnu kicked the hut of the old woman, the hut turned into a palace, and then the old woman again began to make offerings of four gold bananas every Thursday.

Poverty drove the son of the old woman and her daughter-in-law out of their country and they came to the country where the old woman resided. Passing by, they were calling out loudly, offering to do some work. The old woman heard their call and asked them to come upstairs and said, "Apply oil to (massage) my body". While the daughter-in-law was applying oil, she began to cry copiously and her tear drops fell on the back of the old woman. The woman thought she had only given them work because of their needs. Why was this woman crying? The old woman asked her why she was crying, to which she replied that she was not crying because of the work but there was a mole on the back of her mother-in-law (just like yours). The old woman exclaimed, "Oh, and then what happened". The daughter-in-law then narrated the entire story of how her neighbour had advised her, and ultimately how they had become poor and had then beaten and driven out the old woman.

The lesson of the story is that whomsoever gets influenced by others, it is this fate that befalls them.

The old woman then admitted that she was that very same old woman and that she was her daughter-in-law and he was her son. The old woman said to her daughter-in-law. "My own conscience was clear but you were listening to the neighbour and so had to bear so much misery".

The old woman's conscience was clear while she was doing her fasting and making offerings, while the daughter-in-law's conscience was not clear at the time. So, even while gifting four gold bananas every Thursday they were wealthy and when they were not gifting it, they had no wealth.

After doing *puja* and telling the tale, one can eat in the afternoon yellow things, e.g. *rotis* of gram flour and yellow rice. Whatever is offered in *puja* along with some money is given to the poor. Fasting thus brings prosperity and ensures steady income for a woman's husband.

COW

Cow is identified as a mother, so whether healthy, sick or ailing, young or old, the cow is looked after. Killing a cow is the worst possible sin. It amounts to greed as the intention is then to profit by not extending maintenance to the cow in return for all that she has done for mankind. The motive of killing could be a further profiting in its flesh or hide. Cow-slaughter is the killing of an object of love and goes grossly against the principles of giving. Just as the Brahmin is the ritually highest amongst human beings, his counterpart in the animal world is the cow.

In consideration of the holiness of the cow, of the first *chapati* that a person takes on his plate, one piece is broken, touched to a dish, and put aside on the plate to be later given to the cow or the bird. Cows that are pregnant or have delivered a calf may be fed jaggery and flour by any passer-by.

FIRE

The cow is also worshipped in association with fire. A little of every vegetable cooked for the meal is placed on the *chapati* baked first. A small piece of this is broken and touched with each vegetable earlier placed on the *chapati* and then put in the burning *anghithi* or a domestic hearth. This is repeated with two more pieces taken from the above said *chapati*. Then a drop of ghee and a few drops of water are put in the *anghithi* fire and the votary says *namaskar*. The balance of the *chapati* is given to the cow.

Fire is the central object in the rituals conducted with life-cycle ceremonies. The fire of wood is fed on these occasions with *samagri* and *ghee*. *Samagri* consists of aromatic substances, whose burning purifies all that is around.

GODDESSES FOR WOMEN

Of the four goddesses called *Matas*, Santoshi Mata is prayed to once a week and the other three, once or twice a year. Friday is the day of Santoshi Mata. Many women keep a fast this day and tell the tale of Santoshi Mata. The way of

celebrating this fast is given in the story itself which goes as follows.

SANTOSHI MATA

Once, there was an old woman who had seven sons. Six of them were earning but one, the youngest, was an idler. The old woman would make good things to eat for the six elder sons and give only the left-over to the youngest one and his wife. The youngest son was very innocent; he told his wife one day, "See, how much my mother loves me". His wife replied, "She only gives you the left-over to eat". The youngest son did not believe her and wanted to find out for himself.

The next day there was some festival. The old woman made seven kind of eatables. The youngest son, on the pretext of a headache, covered his face with a fine cloth and slept in the kitchen. He saw his mother serve his brothers with all the good food and, when they had eaten, collect the left-over from their plates. She then woke up the youngest son saying, "Son, get up and eat your food". He woke up and told his mother, "I am going away to earn a living". So his mother told him, "You do today what you should have done yesterday".

The youngest son went to look for his wife who, at that time, was making dung cakes. He gave her a ring which was all that he had and asked her to give him something as a remembrance. She had nothing to give, so she pressed her dung-covered hand on his back. The youngest son went to a far away place and found work with a merchant. He learnt his work very fast and soon became a partner of his employer. In twelve years time, he was a very rich man with his own business.

In the meantime, his mother and sisters-in-law ill-treated his wife. She was made to do all the hard work like cutting and bringing wood from the forest. She would be given only the *rotis* made of wheat husk and the water of coconuts.

One day she met some women who were worshipping Santoshi Mata. She asked them, "Sisters, whom are you worshipping? What good comes of this worship?" So they told her that they were worshipping Santoshi Mata; by praying whom, a poor household can become rich, all worries are over; and the mind attains peace. The woman who has no son, gets a

son. The woman whose husband has gone far away gets back her husband. If there are some cases pending in court they are resolved. The house collects wealth; all illness is banished and all desires are fulfilled.

She asked them, "How does one perform the worship?" They told her, "Take jaggery and gram, worth one and a quarter *anna* or five and a quarter *anna*. Every Friday, fast the whole day and tell the story of Santoshi Mata. If you have no one to tell the story to, keep a burning lamp or vessel of water in front of you and say the story, but the *niyam* (rule) must never break. Till such work as you want done, is not accomplished you must regularly keep the fast every Friday, and after your desires are fulfilled you must discontinue the fasts. The Mother will certainly fulfil every wish within a period of three years.

"In breaking the chain of fasts, you take two and a half *seers* of flour and gram and make *khaja*. You must feed eight boys. As far as possible, feed boys from amongst your own relations and household. If this is not possible, feed boys of the neighbourhood. But the day you keep and break the last fast, no one must eat anything sour inside your house".

The old woman's daughter-in-law sold her bundle of wood, brought some jaggery and gram, went to a temple of Santoshi Mata and wept before the idol. Santoshi Mata took pity on her and next Friday, her husband sent her some money and a letter. Her in-laws, on seeing money and the letter, started abusing her even more. So she again went and wept before Santoshi Mata, saying, "I do not want money; you return my husband". Santoshi Mata told her that she would return her husband.

Now, her husband had completely forgotten her in twelve years. Santoshi Mata went and appeared before the man in a dream. She asked, "Are you sleeping or awake?". He replied, "I am neither awake nor sleeping". She asked, "Don't you have any family?" He replied, "I have a mother, brothers and a wife". She told him, "Your mother and sisters-in-law are ill-treating your wife in your absence. You must go back to her". He said, "But, how can I leave my business like this?" She told him, "In the morning, light a lamp and remember me at your place of work. In a few hours all your merchandise will be sold and you will have a heap of money".

In the morning he went to his place of work and did as he was told. Soon all his merchandise was sold and he collected his money and started back home.

His wife, while collecting wood in the forest, saw some dust rising in the distance. She went and asked Santoshi Mata, "Who is it coming?" Santoshi Mata told her, "Your rich husband is coming back. You divide your bundle of wood in three parts. Leave one bundle in my temple, leave another at the river-side; your husband will see it and be tempted to rest by the river-side and cook his food. In the meantime, go home and throw your third bundle in the middle of the courtyard and shout for your share of the *rotis* of wheat husk and coconut water".

The daughter-in-law did as she was told. She went home and asked in a loud voice, "Who has come home today? Give me my share of husk *rotis* and coconut water". Her mother-in-law came out and said, "Why are you shouting? Your rich man has come home". Her man came out and saw the ring on her finger. He was greatly ashmed for having subjected her to so much misery and asked his mother for the keys of their other house. They set up their household and lived in great wealth. Soon the wife was blessed with a son. She then wanted to break her fasts and so she called her sisters-in-law's sons for a meal.

Her sisters-in-law taught their sons to ask for something sour. The boys accordingly started asking for something sour when they sat down to eat. When she refused, they asked for some money. In her innocence she gave them money with which the boys bought tamarind and ate it. Santoshi Mata was greatly displeased. Soon the king's men came and arrested her husband. She went to Santoshi Mata and cried, "O Mother, what was my fault?" Santoshi Mata told her, "You gave the boys tamarind to eat". She said, "I was innocent; I did not know about it". Santoshi Mata told her never to make such a mistake again. Soon her husband came back and said that he had been called by the king only to pay some taxes.

The woman, then, again wanted to break her fast. She went to her sisters-in-law but their sons said, "You must give us sour things to eat or we will not come". So she called eight Brahmin boys and fed them and gave them fruits. Santoshi Mata was



Santoshi Mata—She is crowned and sitting cross-legged on a throne and has four arms. One hand on the left side is raised in blessing and another at its back has a sword. On the right side, the hand upfront has a bowl of rice and the hand at the back holds a *trishul*. The woman standing with the bundle of logs of wood, on the left side, is the heroine in the story of Santoshi Mata. The man standing on the right side of Santoshi Mata is her husband. The temple in the background hoists a flag with 'Jai Santoshi Mata' written on it. In the foreground to the left is a cow signifying household prosperity. The six women in the foreground to the left represents the six sisters-in-law of the story. The woman standing in right hand lower corner is the same as the one that is standing upon the left side. Here she is feeding the boys to fulfill her vow to Santoshi Mata.

greatly pleased. Every week the woman would go to Santoshi Mata to pray.

Santoshi Mata thought that one day she should also go to her house. She went dressed as a very ugly woman with jaggery and gram on her face. As soon as the woman saw Santoshi Mata, she recognized her. She was feeding her child but she put the child down and ran towards Santoshi Mata. Her mother-in-law started shouting at her, "You are throwing away your child for the sake of some horrible woman". So she cried, "This is Santoshi Mata", and held her feet. Santoshi Mata was greatly pleased and blessed her.

HOI MATA

Hoi Ashtami is the ritual that falls on the eight day of Kartik *vadi*. Women who have children keep a fast and in the evening once the stars appear, a figure drawing of Hoi is made on the wall in the house and it is prayed to.

The story of Hoi Mata goes like this: There was a king who had seven sons and one daughter. Whenever the day of Hoi Mata came, all the seven daughters-in-law and the daughter used to keep the fast. Once the seven-sisters-in-law told their *nanad* (husband's sister), "Come sister, let us go and dig up the earth for the *puja*. They all went outside the city and dug up the earth. The Gau Mata was delivering her children there and the *nanad* did not know about it. She dug and killed the children of the Gau Mata. At this Gau Mata got very angry and calling her names "murderess, sinful, given to bad deeds", said further, "On the day of Hoi you have killed my children; now you either give me your womb or get me a womb from someone else. At this her youngest sister-in-law (brother's wife) who loved her *nanad* the most said, "We have only one *nanad* so you take my womb instead of hers".

When she (this woman) came home, she found her son dead. Gau Mata said, "You have killed seven of my children, so I will also kill seven of your children". Afterwards this youngest sister-in-law had six sons, each of whom died soon after birth. Then she had a seventh son who also died on the

day of Hoi Ashtami. She thought that since Hoi Mata had taken her child, she will ask Hoi Mata for her child. She did not let her child be cremated, sat and waited for Hoi Mata with her child in her lap.

When Hoi Mata came she caught hold of her feet. Hoi Mata told her, "You leave my feet, O'Murderess". But she did not leave her feet and said, "You must first promise me a boon". Hoi Mata got irritated and agreed to make a promise. She asked Hoi Mata, "You have taken away six of my sons; now return at least this son to me. I had given my womb instead of my *nanad*. Now you must forgive me". Then Hoi Mata took pity and sprinkled some blood from her little finger onto the boy and the boy revived. Celebration of Hoi are done by keeping a fast for the whole day and at 4.00 p.m. the story of Hoi is retold and water-offerings to the sun are given. Then sweet *puree* and *gulgule* are made. An earthen pitcher full of water is placed before the diagram of Hoi and fruits are placed on it. The fruits include water chestnuts, berries, sweet potatoes, radish, sugar cane. Then a silver necklace is put around it. The string consists of two silver beads in the name of each son.

The *puree and gulgule* are kept on a metal dish and water is sprinkled seven times around it. This is called *baina*. When the stars come out, the fast is broken with *halwa*. Silver beads necklace is later worn by the children's mother. The water of the pitcher is used for taking a bath on Diwali day. The fruits are eaten by the children.

KARBA MATA

Karba Chauth is the fourth day of Krishna Paksha of the month of Kartik. This is the day of fasting for married women who pray for the long life of their husbands.

The story of Karba Chauth, which is related to this ritual, is that there was a king who had seven sons, seven daughters-in-law and one daughter. All the eight loved each other very much. They all used to sit together to eat. When the day of the Karba Chauth fast came, all the sisters-in-law kept the fast.

When the brothers returned from hunting in the evening, they said, "now let us all eat together". At this their sister said that she would eat after she has seen the moon come out. The

brothers could not eat without their sister. They said, "If the moon rises right now, will you eat right now?" and she replied, "Yes".

At this, the brothers took a (round) sieve and one of them took fire along and they all went near the hills where a fire was lit and the sieve placed on top. One brother went back to the sister and said, "*Jiji*, look, the moon has risen". The sister told her sisters-in-law, "Come *bhabhi*, the moon has arisen, let us offer water to the moon". The sisters-in-law replied, "No *jiji*, this is your moon that has risen; ours will come out later".

The sister was very innocent; she offered her obeissance to the illusory moon and broke her fast. As soon as she broke a morcel of food, the king's messangers arrived from the kingdom of her in-laws, bringing the news of the death of her husband. She immediately got up and went to her husband's house. After going there she told her in-laws that they should not cremate her husband, "My *suhag* (husband) has been taken away by Chauth Mata and I will take him back from her".

For one year, she remained locked up in a room with her husband's dead body. Next year the festival of Karba Chauth came again. When Chauth Mata came to her house she caught her feet. Chauth Mata asked her to leave her feet, but the Princess said only if she (Chauth Mata) promised her a boon, will she leave her. Chauth Mata agreed and asked the princess to ask for a boon. The princess said, "You return my *suhag* (husband)". Chauth Mata was forced to return her husband because she had made a promise. But she told her, "You had left my fast in between; that is why I had taken away your husband. But your devotion and love has pleased me greatly". The Princess saw her husband getting up, rubbing his eyes. From that day onwards every married woman must keep a fast on the fourth *tithi* (date) of every month. If someone cannot keep twelve fasts, she must keep at least four. If she cannot keep four, she must keep two; one on Karba Chauth and the other on Sakat Chauth.

SAKAT CHAUTH

Sakat Chauth in Magh, *vadi* four is celebrated by women by keeping a fast, telling the story of Sakat Mata in front of a

diagram made on the wall. All offerings are made of *til* (Sesame seeds), jaggery and sugar. The story goes as follows.

In a city there were two sisters-in-law (the wives of two brothers); the younger sister-in-law (*devrani*) was very poor and the elder sister-in-law (*jethani*) very rich. She never helped her *devrani*. The *devrani* used to wash utensils in her *jethani's* house who in turn would give her the left-over food to eat. The *devrani* and her children thus barely managed to subsist. On the day of Sakat Chauth the *jethani* kept her fast with great pomp and show. She prepared many tasty dishes. The *devrani* also kept a fast, but because she was very poor she could not cook any thing. Like every other day she had gone to her *jethani's* house to clean utensils. After cleaning the utensils she asked her sister-in-law, "*jethaniji*, give me some food; my children are waiting (hungry) at home".

But *jethani* told her, "Today I have kept a fast; there is nothing to eat at home", and she hid all that she had prepared. The poor *devrani* quietly came home, quite crest fallen. At home all the children surrounded her and asked, "Ma, ma, today you must have got very good things to eat; give them to us for we are very hungry". The poor *devrani* started to cry out of grief. That night nobody ate anything in that house and they all went to bed hungry.

At night, Chauth Mata came. She woke up *devrani* and asked her, "Tell me where should I defecate?" The *devrani* was feeling very miserable because she had gone to bed quite hungry and, more so, because her children had also slept hungry. So she said, "Where will you do it? The whole house is lying in front of you, do wherever you like". The Chauth Mata defecated all over the house. Then she asked, "Now tell me where I should clean myself". The *devrani* in irritation said, "Do it on my head". The Chauth Mata did as she was told and went away.

In the morning when the *devrani* got up, she found the whole house filled with gold coins and her hairs were filled with pearls. She said this must all be the beneficence of Chauth Mata. She told her children to get a balance from their aunt's house since she was so poor that she did not even have a balance. The children ran to their aunt's house and asked for a balance. The *jethani* was very clever; she wondered that her younger sister-in-law had not even food to eat in her house,

what was it that she wanted to weigh? She stuck a little jaggery under one of the pans.

The *devrani* weighed the gold coins with the balance and put them away in sacks. The balance was then returned. When *jethani* looked under the pan, she found one gold coin. She was extremely surprised and went running to her sister-in-law's house and asked, "Younger sister! Has my brother-in-law looted this wealth?" The younger sister-in-law was very innocent. She said, "Elder sister, this is all the beneficence of Chauth Mata. When we did not get anything to eat from your house, we all went to bed hungry. At night Chauth Mata came and asked me where she should defecate? Where should she clean herself? I told her to do it wherever she liked and clean herself on my head. I had said this in anger but Chauth Mata gave all this and went away".

The *jethani* was very greedy; she thought Chauth Mata would give her wealth also. So next year, when Chauth Mata's fast came, she cleaned her house with cow-dung and clay, washed her hair with perfumed soap and waited at night for Chauth Mata to come. When Chauth Mata came she at once said, 'Mata, I have cleaned my house very well, you defecate wherever you like and clean yourself well on my head". Chauth Mata did as she was told and went away. In the morning *jethani* got up to find her whole house stinking with faeces and her hair smelling extremely foul. She started cursing Chauth Mata. Her husband told her, "You fool, we had everything in our house, yet in your greed you did all this, you got what you deserved. The younger one had nothing, so Mata in her beneficence gave her wealth. You fool, get up and clean yourself and the house". *Jethani* did as she was told and realized her folly. From that time onwards the *devrani* and *jethani* lived quite harmoniously.

CHAPTER FIVE

FORMS OF RITUALS

Every year, certain fixed dates are marked for celebrating a festival or for obeisance and rituals to a god or spirit. The date is fixed by the Hindu (Bikrami) calender. This date does not concur, from year to year, with any month of the Roman calendar. The Roman calendar is based on calculations of the position of the sun vis-a-vis the earth. The Hindu calendar bases itself on both the movements of the sun and the moon, and there are several different calendars, the most popular is the Bikrami.

The phases of the moon go by what is called *tithi.* Thus is one complete cycle of the moon, i.e. from full moon to no moon to full moon, there are always 30 *tithis*; 15 in the period of waxing of the moon and 15 in the waning period. Each, very roughly, corresponds to a little more than 14 solar days. The month follows the cycle: day next to full moon, to no moon, to full moon. The waning period is called *vadi* or *krishna paksh* and the waxing period is referred to as *sudi* or *shukla paksha.* The first ends in a new moon and the second in full moon.

There are twelve months in the Hindu year; starting from new year around March, there are in order: Chait, Vaisakh, Jaith, Asadh, Shrawana, Bhadrapad, Ashwin, Kartik, Margashirsh, Posh, Magh and Phagun.

When a *tithi* starts and continues up to a convenient time, so that the rituals can be conveniently performed during the solar day, then the ritual is assigned to that day. Suppose, a *tithi* begins in the evening and ends the next morning, then the ritual will be celebrated starting from the morning, although the *tithi* started in the previous night and could have been celebrated the earlier day. Sometimes two *tithis* may be marked in the same day.

The system is truly complicated and its explanation is beyond scope of a layman. The source of the information for

them are the calendars, the government notifications and the pundits. It has happened many times that the three don't agree with one another about the correct Roman date on which people should celebrate their festivals, leading to much confusion.

In general, on festive and ritual days, something special, like sweet meats, is bought from the market or special preparations are made at home. People put on finer and clean clothes, sometimes new ones. A longer than usual *puja* may be done at home and many more than the usual number of family members perform the *puja.* A visit to the temple is a must even for the women and children.

The pundit may also visit and may be given cash gift or some new clothing. The *bhangi* may call for being given left-over food or even a cash gift.

CALENDERICAL RITUALS

Around March the ritual year begins. The first new moon, the first *sudi* day in the month of Chait, is the new years day, marked by fasting, bathing in holy rivers or lakes and prayers.

With the new year starts the period of nine days, *Neorate.* On new years day, reading of the Ramayana may be started, to end on Ram Naumi, the ninth day. Alternately, the daily worship of goddess Durga may begin to go up to the eighth day, Durga Ashtami. It is during these days the *Jagrans,* night long vigil and singing of songs to goddess Durga is very popular.

Gangaur: On the sixth *sudi* Chait the worship of *Gangaur* is performed. These are ritual figurines representing one's sisters and daughters.

Durga Ashtami: On the eighth *sudi* Chait is Durga Ashtami. Prayers and fasting are done in dedication to the goddess Durga. Fruits, vegetables and sweets are sent to one's sister's or daughter's children.

Ram Naumi: On the ninth, *sudi* Chait is Ram Naumi. This is the birthday of Lord Rama. The Ramayana is specifically read on this day. It is a day of worship and fasting.

Hanuman Jayanti: On the fifteenth *sudi* Chait is Hanuman Jayanti. The day corresponds to the first full moon of the new year in the month of Chait. It is the birthday of Hanuman. It is a day marked by a visit to a Hanuman temple.

Basoda: On the seventh *vadi* Vaishakha in the month of is Basoda, dedicated to the goddess of small pox, Sitala Mata. Celebration of Basoda (Sitala Mata) is done as follows: Stale food that was cooked the previous evening is eaten on this day. The more orthodox do not even light their fires on this day and so the stale food is not even warmed. The food consists of sweets, *gulgule*, *purees*, vegetables and rice made sweet with jaggery. Out of dough, two small *diyas* are made and 21 small *rotis*, 21 small spindles, and finally 21 little balls are made. All these are placed on a metal plate with some of the sweets and *gur* along with some turmeric and green gram and a piece of white paper. Some earthen *diyas* with rice and curds are also put on the plate.

Little garlands are made out of *cowries*. Holes are first made in *cowries*; by rubbing their back on a hard stone. They are strung with a hand-spun thread, that has been coloured by dipping in turmeric. One garland is made for each child in the family. The same garland is worn by the child on this day, year after year, till the age of twelve when this is offered to the Devi (Sitala). The *puja* done on this occasion is that of Sitala Mata.

Basoda Mata is prayed to *bi*-annually. The days for special prayers to her falls once before Holi and once after it. On the first occasion, along with the usual ritual items, cowdung replicas of rings, sword, shield, betel leaf and nut are made. These are strung together with five or seven items in each string. The number of strings is the same as the number of sons a woman has. One string is placed where the Basoda *puja* is performed. The other is thrown in the attic to ward off evil; the rest of the strings are strung on to the Holi fire-pile.

Barh Ambavas: On the fifteenth, *sudi*, Jaith is Barh Ambavas. This day is dedicated to the *bo* tree. A fast is kept on this day. Sweets and *purees* are kept on a metal plate, women do a *baina* and give the plate to an older woman of the family. If a woman is newly married, she puts twenty-one *matthi*, sweets and money (to the denomination of Rs 21/- or Rs 11/-) and a saree and blouse on a *thali* and gives it to her mother-in-law. In the

afternoon, at around 2-3 p.m., the women go to worship the *bo* tree. If there is no tree nearby, a branch of the *bo* tree, kept in a metal container, serves the purpose. At the time of worship the women take 7 or 11 rounds of the *bo* tree tying a hand-made thread around it. The fast is for half the day, and is discontinued in the afternoon after the *puja*.

In the year a son has got married or a boy is born in the family, there is one more aspect to the ritual. In eleven *thalis*, sweets like *patashe* or *gulgule* (which have been prepared for the fast) are kept in quantities of five or seven. On each sweet a five paise or ten paise coin is placed and a handkerchief or ribbon is placed on top. These are distributed amongst the neighbours. One *thali* with saree and blouse has to be given by a woman to her *nanad*, i.e. husband's sister.

Ganga Dussehera: On the tenth *sudi* Jaith is Ganga Dussehera. On this day, people bathe in the Ganges and ritually eat melons.

Nirjala Ekadshi: On the eleventh *sudi* Jaith is Nirjala Ekadshi. It is a popular day for fasting and as the title of this ritual day implies (nirjala meaning without water), during the fast of this day, not even a drop of water is consumed. At numerous points in the city, groups of people organize *piaos* i.e. stalls to offer sweet, very dilute milk to all passers-by. At the stalls loud-speakers blare out pop music. New water pitchers may be bought and kept at the business premises. The gift to the daughter/sister should include a utensil and, according to some, it should be a water pitcher and (hand) fan.

Guru Purnima: On the fifteenth *sudi*, Asadh is Guru Purnima. The day corresponds to a full moon. This day anyone who has a *guru*, worships him and feeds him while children may be given their first pen and ink to scribble with. The goddes Saraswati may be worshipped on this day.

During the month of Shrawan all the four Mondays are dedicated to fasting and prayers for Lord Shiva.

Nag Panchami: On the fifth *vadi* Shrawan is Nag Panchami. It is dedicated to the worship of the King Cobra, which is associated with Shiva. Milk is the appropriate offering given to images of snakes or, if possible, to live ones.

Raksha Bandhan: On the fifteenth, *sudi* Shrawan is Raksha Bandhan. It is the full moon day in the month of Shrawan. By

the ritual on this day, a brother promises protection to his sister. The brothers and sisters fast upto the time of the ritual, which consists of the sister annointing the brothers forehead with *tika*, applying rice grains to the *tika* and, then she ties a *rakhi* or roli (sacred thread) round his right wrist and puts a sweet meat into his mouth. The brother, in turn, offers sweet meats and a cash gift to his sister and promises to protect his sister whenever she calls on him for help. The sister may be given a saree and her children clothes and sweets.

Janam Ashtami: On the eighth *vadi*, Bhadrapad is Janam Ashtami. This is the birthday of Lord Krishna. It is a day of fasting and prayers and people keep awake till midnight to herald the birth of Krishna, at which time it is usual to break one's fast. Tableaux are set up by different organizations, especially temples, to re-enact the story of Krishna's birth.

Janam Ashtami is amongst the biggest ritual celebrations in the year. It is a holiday in all government establishments, schools and colleges. However, those in business do open their establishments for business. The children may come to the place of business and hang around. This is specially the case when the business is a prestigious onè. At home, good foods are served to those not fasting. The children, especially young girls, also arrange a display of their dolls to show the birth of Krishna. Stories of Krishna are repeated in the conversations on this day.

Ganesh Chauth: On the fourth *sudi* Bhadon is Ganesh Chauth; a day in honour of Ganesh. Processions bearing the idols of Ganesh may be taken out. It is a day of fasting in his honour.

Shradh: From first *vadi* Ashwin to fifteenth *vadi* Ashwin is the period called Shradh. It begins, the day after full moon in the month of Ashwin and ends at no moon. Dedicated to the ancestors and their worship, it is like a period of mourning. People do not shave, nor wash clothes, nor wear clean clothes. Each family worships its male ancestors in the direct line on the particular *tithi* that the ancestor had died. The homage to dead ancestors ensures peace for them.

The Brahmins are fed and gifts are given to them. The food includes *kheer*, *puree* and *imarti*, and the gift is usually *dhoti*

and *angochha*. Finally, water offering is made to the ancestors.

The last day of the period Shradh is the day for the ancestor who may have been accidentally left out, or remote ancestors who had not been individually propitiated. The Shradh of the dead father receives the greatest attention.

Neorate: From the first *sudi* Ashwin to ninth *sudi* Ashwin are the Neorate or Navratri. These are nine days and nights beginning from the day of the new moon in the month of Ashwin. The period is dedicated to the nine forms of goddess Durga. Fasting is the order of the day and a meal may be taken in the evening. The eighth day is called Durga Ashtami and offerings of food, consisting of boiled gram, *kheer*, *puree* and *pua*, are given to the goddess. The ninth day is the day for worship of all the different forms of goddess Durga which include Maha Kali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati, Durga, Chandika, etc. Jagrans are popularly performed at this time of the year.

One of the important celebrations during the Neorate and the two days following is that of Rama-lila. During these days the story of the Ramayana is enacted out on stage. Each day's drama is preceded by a long pageantry consisting of some forty to fifty carriages, each one depicting a particular scene from the Ramayana or even the Mahabharata.

The ninth day of Neorate is called Naumi and marks the day when Rama attacked Lanka. The tenth day is Vijay Dashmi. This day celebrates the victory of Rama over Ravana. This day is of a great significance for Kshatriyas. Numerous organizations enact the Ramayana in the preceding 10 days and this day is the final which shows the victory of Rama over the forces of Ravana. It is popularly symbolized by erecting three giant effigies of the three demons, namely Ravana, Meghnad and Kumbhkaran, stuffed with crackers which are then set on fire. Numerous committees and organizations enact this drama on a large scale. The day next to Vijay Dashmi is the day of Bharat Milap when Bharat comes to meet Rama.

On Vijay Dashmi every year, the members of the family record their presence in a register. The names of all those present is written down and an auspicious sign is made. There is also worship of the instruments of livlihood, scriptures and texts by the Brahmins, of weapons by the Kshatriyas, of scales

and money vault by the Vaishyas and of tools by the Shudras.

Sharad Purnima: On the fifteenth *sudi* Ashwin is Sharad Purnima. It corresponds to the full moon in the month of Ashwin. It is a day of fasting and taking a holy bath. Prayers for the welfare of children are offered. *Kheer*, ghee and sugar are mixed together at night and eaten the next day.

Karva Chauth: On the fourth *vadi* Kartik is Karva (Karba) Chauth. Karva Mata is the presiding goddess of the day. She is a goddess for women who fast, perform *puja*, see the moon come out, and only then eat.

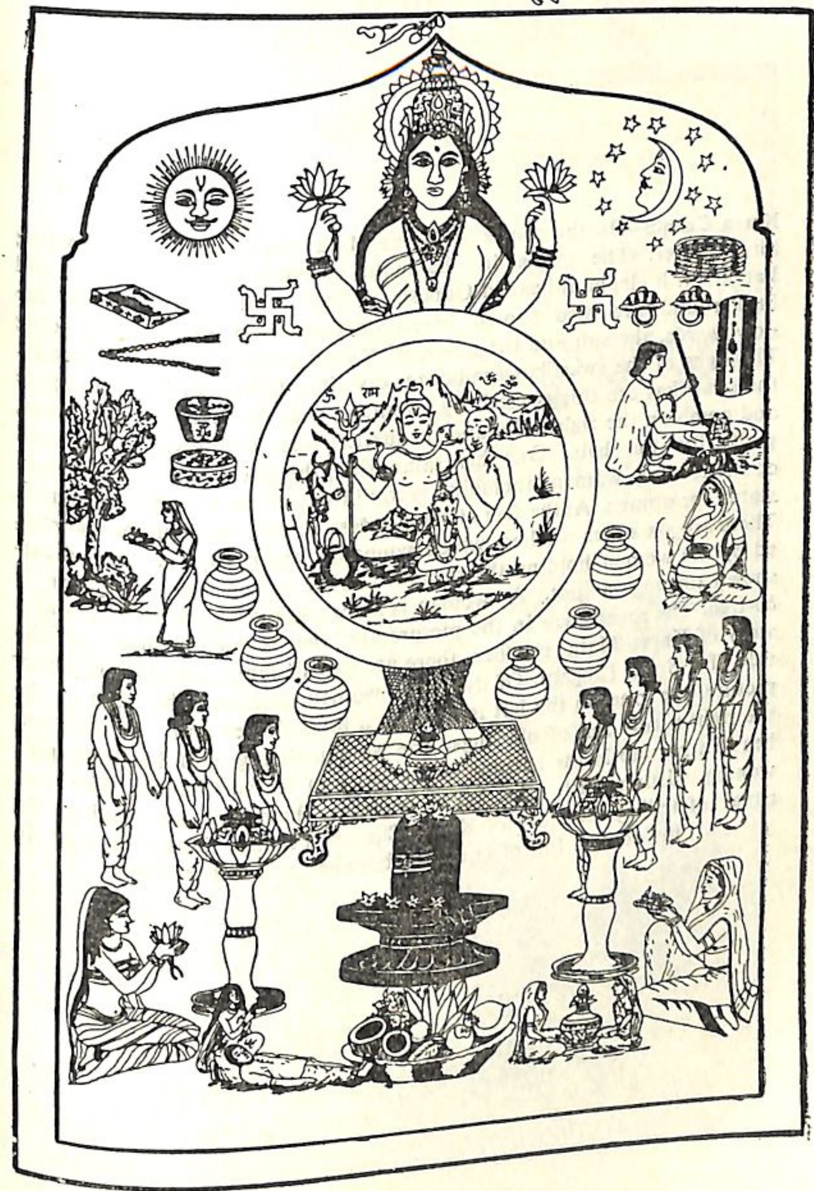
Hoi Ashtami: On the eighth *vadi* Kartik is Hoi (Ahoi) Ashtami. It involves fasting and prayers to Hoi Mata, a goddess primarily for women.

Dhan Teras: On the thirteenth *vadi* Kartik is Dhan Teras. On this day nobody gives out money and around this time, it is customary to buy some new utensils for the household. The houses have already gone through their annual cleaning, painting and whitewashing, and as such it heralds the coming of Diwali.

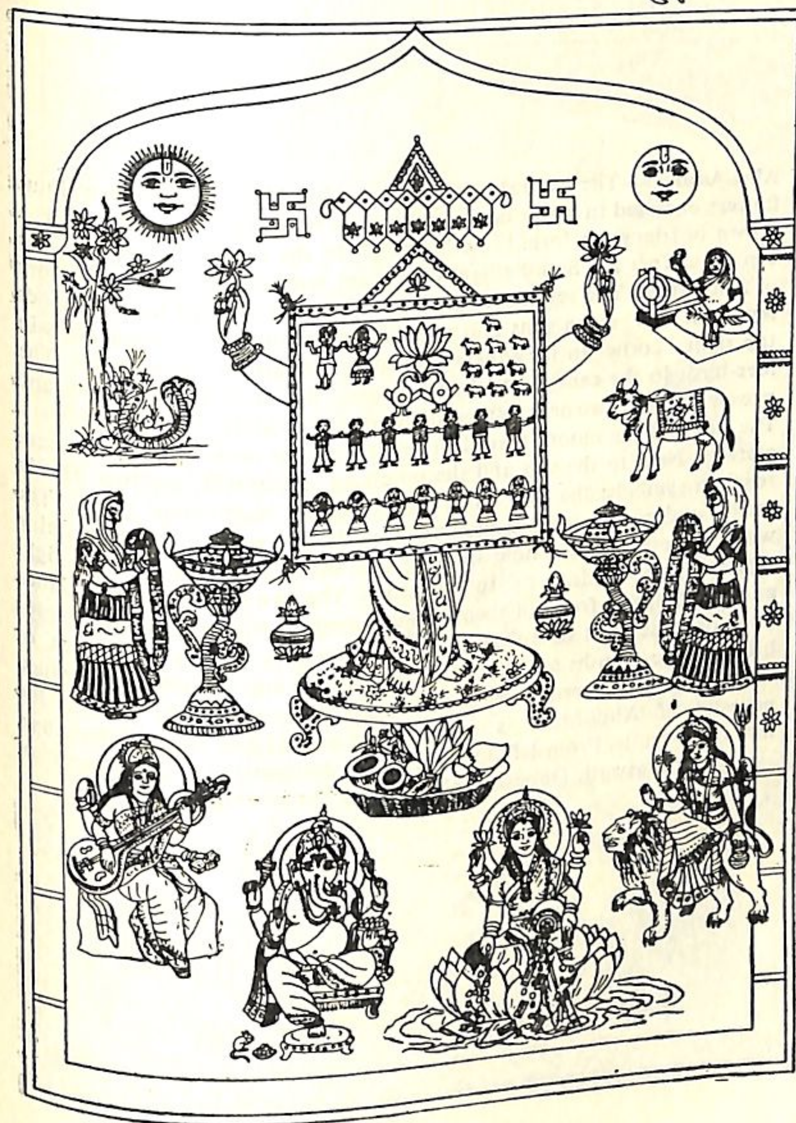
Chhoti Diwali: On the fourteenth *vadi* Kartik is Chhoti Diwali and on the fifteenth, *vadi* Kartik is Bari Diwali. Bari Diwali is also the day before the new moon in the month of Kartik. This festival is one of great rejoicing and happiness for everyone. The children have their doll display and worship is offered to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth at the place of work as well as at home. For many firms, it is the day of closing of the accounting year. The new account books are duly annointed.

Similarly the cash box or money vault is annointed and it is customary to draw the figure of the Swastika and write on the wall in a conspicuous part of the business premises the words "Shubh Labham" meaning omens of success or profits. Worship of the goddess Lakshmi is performed in the household where one has an economic share. Thus a man, if he has interests in a joint family property but lives independently, would join the *puja* in his 'joint' family as well as in his own house. It is a day of good eating, specially sweets, as well as a day of distributing sweets to others.

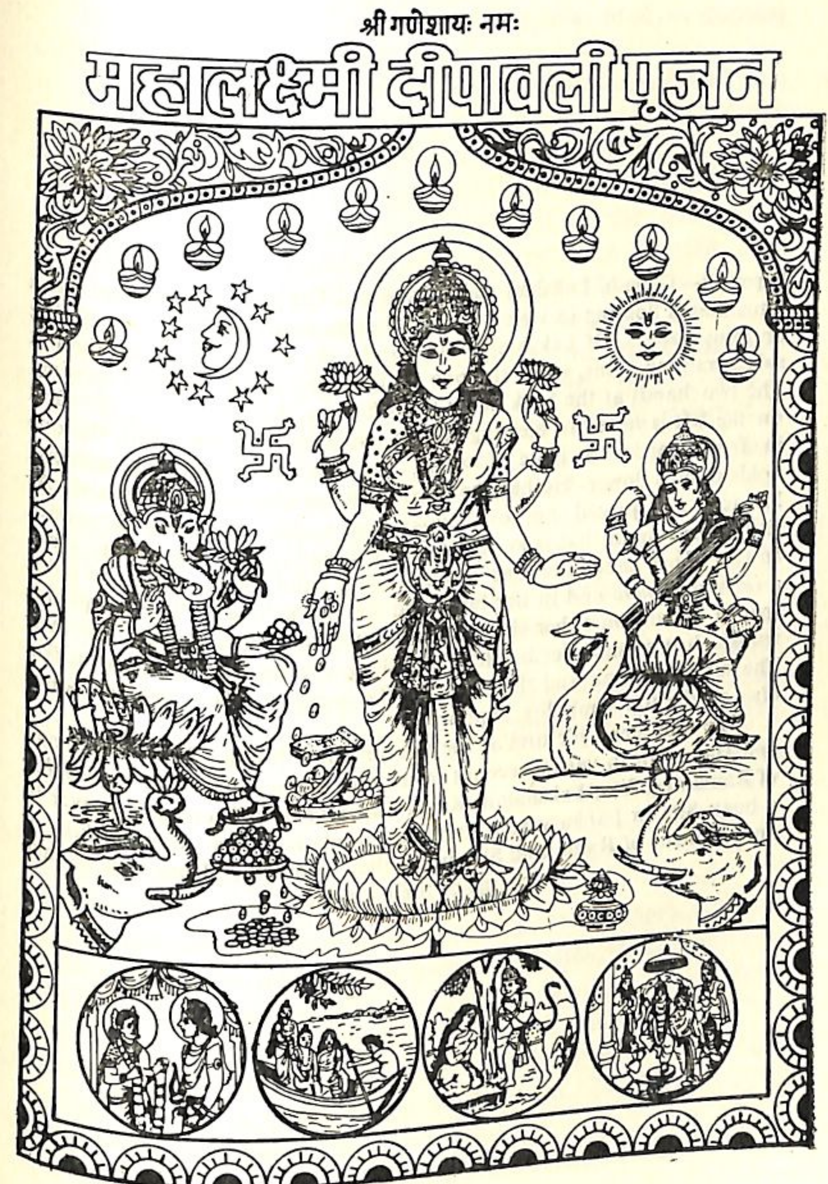
Of course, Diwali is popularly identified with fire works. Much to the annoyance of elders, the children start playing



Karva Chauth—In the centre is Karva-Mata encrowned and holding lotus flower. The circle in the centre contains picture of Shiva and Parvati with elephant-headed Ganesh. A bull and mountains in the background are also shown here. Starting from the top and going downwards, the sun and the moon with stars around indicate eternity. The signs of the swastikas symbolizes divinity. Other articles alongside the swastikas are things used by women, that is bangles, toe-rings, and comb on the right side, and on the left side, winnowing—fan and plaits for the hair. On this same side, the two little boxes contain cosmetics for women including vermillion put on to indicate marital status for women. At the feet of the goodess, rests a small pitcher (*karba*). There are six other pitchers which symbolize prosperity. This is indicated by the women holding the seventh pitcher in her lap. A potter is shown turning a pot. A woman is shown going to offer prayers at a *bo*-tree. The seven men in the picture are the seven brothers of the story of Karva-Mata. Further, there are two lit lamp stands on either side of a Shiva Lingam. Of the two women, one on either side of the picture, the one on the left is offering a lotus flower and the one on the right a tray full of offerings. The woman sitting with her husband's head in her lap is the heroine of the story of Karva Chauth. The two women sitting with the karva between them are performing the ritual of telling the story of Karva Chauth. Finally, there is a tray in the centre, full of coconut, bananas and other fruits.



Ahoi-Ashtami—The central figure is of Ahoi-Mata. The seven lotus flowers enclosed in seven hexagonal spaces represent her face and a crown in triangular form is on her head. In the central square in the top left corner are Seth-Sethani (merchant and his wife) of the story of Ahoi-Mata. The seven men and seven women showed holding hands represent the seven sons and seven daughters-in-law. The ten cows in top right corner in the square indicate a prosperous household. The love-birds in the centre, just below a lotus flower indicate peace and prosperity. The two ornamented hands of Ahoi-Mata hold lotus flowers. The sun and the moon, placed in the left corner respectively, represent eternity. Next to the sun and the moon on either side, are two Hindu religious symbols: the Swastikas, indicating an auspicious thing. The snake under the tree symbolizes wealth. The woman at the spinning wheel represents, household industry and thrift. The cow on the right represents Ahoi-Mata as in the story. The two women with garlands and the lamps in front of them simply worship. Just besides the lamps on either side are two *kalash* or engraved vessels, usually of bronze or brass, whose mouths are decorated with leaves and a coconut entwined with a few *mouli* threads covers the mouth of the vessel. In front of the pedestal of Ahoi-Mata is a metal tray containing coconut, bananas, and other fruits. From left to right at the bottom, are the figures of Saraswati, Ganesh, Lakshmi and Durga respectively.



Dipawali—Ganesh, Lakshmi and Saraswati—Lakhmi is standing on a lotus that is floating in water, while Ganesh and Saraswati are sitting on lotus flowers. Of Lakshmi's four hands, the one upfront on the left side is raining coins, while the one on the right side is raised in blessing. The two hands at the back carry lotus flowers. As to Ganesh, the hand on the left is raised in blessing. Of his two hands on the right, the one in front carries a plate of sweets, and the one at the back, notably, holds a lotus flower. He has the mark of the *trishul* on his forehead. At his feet are placed account books and a plate of sweets. Saraswati, sitting on a swan that is swimming in the water, also has four arms. In two of her hands she has a *veena*. In a hand on the right she holds a *rudraksha mala* and in her last hand she has a book. Two elephants (partly shown) on either side of the picture hold lotus flowers in their trunks. Just at shoulder height of Lakshmi, are the signs of the *swastika*. The sun, the moon and the stars signify eternity. The lighted lamps *diya* on the top symbolise Dipawali.

The four small pictures at the bottom show Rama, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman in various scenes from the Ramayana—the *swayambar* of Rama and Sita; Lakshman, Rama and Sita in exile crossing a river in a boat; Sita in Lanka where Hanuman meets her; the *Rajyabhishek* or annointment of Rama and Sita when they come back from exile to take charge of their kingdom.

with crackers a good ten days before Diwali. During the pre-Diwali nights men play cards and gamble.

On Diwali. houses are illuminated by rows of *diyas* burning oil wicks. Cities have a festive look.

Men of the household offer prayers first to Ganesh and then to Lakshmi and, then, the women offer prayers to Diwali which is the image of Ganesh and Lakshmi housed together.

Clay idols of Ganesh and Lakshmi, called Diwali, are purchased from the bazar and are included in the paraphernaelia of worship. Figure-drawings representing Ganesh and Lakshmi can also be made on the wall and used.

Diwali is believed to the celebrated as the day of the return of Lord Rama to his kingdom after having conquered Lanka, the kingdom of Ravana and after having killed him, and completing fourteen years in exile. On his return the populace of the state rejoiced by lighting up their homes and fire works. This is the most important festival for the Vaishyas and various stories are told about how Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, came to choose the household of the Vaishya as her place of abode. These stories always include some special effort put in by the Vaishya to please the goddess of wealth.

Around Diwali gambling is very popular. The night of Diwali is also the darkest night of the year and is referred to as the night of thieves. In which case it is appropriate to sit up the night.

Govardhan Puja: On the first *sudi* Kartik is Goverdhan Puja. Goverdhan mount of Krishna legend is prayed to. Dry henna is applied to the palm of the right hand and the palm is printed on to one's cows or otherwise cows are marked with henna.

Bhaiya Dooj: On the second *sudi* Kartik is Bhaiya Dooj. It emphasizes the relationship between brother and sister. On this day brother and sister may go to bathe in a holy river or lake and, then, the married sister invites her brother to her house and they eat a meal together. It is also customary for the brother to give a cash present to the sister. Usually the ritual takes a slightly different form.

The brothers and sisters will bathe, cleanse, but will not eat anything until the ritual of Bhaiya Dooj is over. The brother sits facing the East. The sister sits opposite him and in her lap she holds some *patashe* and in the palm of her hand there are

some roasted grams. Then an elderly woman in the house reads out the katha or story of Bhaiya Dooj. Sometimes the brother is not present at the ritual scene until the Bhaiya Dooj story is over and only comes in for the annointing ceremony. If the brother is to come from a far-off place, the sister may, after hearing the story, drink a glass of water or have a cup of tea and wait till her brother comes.

The story of Bhaiya Dooj that is recounted on this occasion is: There was an old woman. She had a son. The son was never abused by anyone and his mother had never abused him either.

Then, once the festival of Bhaiya Dooj came. The boy saw that all other boys had *tika* on their foreheads and were going to their sisters' houses, wearing new clothes. The boy asked his mother which festival it was and what happened on that day. The old woman told her son that it was the festival of Bhaiya Dooj when brothers go to the houses of their sisters; the sisters do *tika* on the forehead of their brothers and, then, the brothers eat at their sister's place. On this day, no brother keeps his forehead bare. So the boy asked his mother, "Do I not have a sister?" The old woman told him, "Yes, son, you have a sister but when you were very small, she was married across the seven seas, in a very far off place". The boy told his mother that he would go to his sister's house and bring her home, especially as his wedding was also fixed for the next month. The old woman told him that his sister would not even recognize him; what was the use of his going? But the boy was adamant and he set off towards his sister's house.

When he reached her house he saw that she was spinning thread on a spinning wheel. He went up to his sister and did *namaste* and said, "Didi, Rama, Rama". The sister was spinning seven spools of threads in her brother's name. This was to be done without speaking. So, she kept quiet. He again greeted her, but since she was not supposed to speak, she did not reply. The boy thought that his mother was right in saying that his sister would not recognize him.

He started to go back. When his sister saw that he was going away, she quickly completed her spinning and came running after him. She asked him to come home and told him that she was spinning seven spools of thread in his name because

she could not come to him on Bhaiya Dooj. She embraced her brother and brought him home.

Then she went running to her neighbour's house to ask about what one did when one's brother came home. The neighbour told her that you wipe your kitchen with mustard oil and cook rice in ghee and give it to your brother. She did as she was told but neither the kitchen would dry nor the rice would cook. She again went to her neighbour who told her, "You are quite mad. This is only a manner of speaking. You wipe your kitchen with cowdung and cook rice in water and give it to your brother with *ghee* and brown sugar." The sister did as she was told and fed her brother. Then, the brother asked his sister to come along with him, as he was getting married the next month. The sister declined, for how could she leave all her work and come away so far with him. The brother told his sister that he would go away early next morning.

The next day the sister got up very early and ground some wheat in the grinding stone and made *laddus*, tied them in a piece of cloth and gave to her brother. Later in the morning her children got up and asked their mother, "Ma, Ma, what did you give to uncle when he went away?" Their mother told them, "I gave him *laddus* and I will give some to you". She went to the grinding stone and found that a black cobra had got ground in the grinding stone. She got scared and leaving her household as it was, she ran to her brother.

She reached the jungle and found her brother sleeping under a tree and the bundle with the *laddus* lying near him. She quickly dug a pit and buried the *laddus*. When the brother got up he was amazed to see his sister sitting near him and the bundle of *laddus* missing. He asked his sister, "Where are my *laddus*?" The sister told him that she wanted to see him very much and that she was very thirsty, she would drink water from somewhere and go back. Her brother said, "Sister, this is a jungle; where shall I get water from?" The sister said, "I will get up on a tree and look". Getting upon a tree, she saw four potters making something at a distance. She said that she would go there, for they would certainly have water.

The sister went there and drank water. She then asked the potters what strange shape they were making. The potters at first refused to tell her, then said, "There is an only son of an

old woman. He is uncursed; that is why he will die early. Four times his death will come. Once, he will go to his sister's house who will make *laddus* for him but in the grinding stone, a black cobra will get ground. Second time, when his marriage procession is going out of his house, the door will collapse over him. The third time, when the marriage procession is resting in the shade, the tree will fall on him; and fourth time, when he takes off his shoes for the wedding ritual, a black snake will come and sit in his shoes and when he wears his shoes, it will bite him". The sister asked, "Is there no way to save him?" The potters said, "Yes, the first time, if someone buries the *laddus* in a pit, he would be saved. Second time, if they break the wall and take out the marriage procession, he will be saved. Third time, if they sit in the sun instead of the shade, he will be saved. Fourth time, if someone keeps a saucer of milk and when the snake comes out to drink the milk, thread its mouth with needle and thread, he will be saved. Moreover, if someone who loves him keeps cursing him, he will have a long life".

When the sister came back, the brother asked her, "Sister, have you had water?" The girl replied in affirmative and cursed him. The boy was extremly surprised and said, "*Didi*, why are you cursing me? You go home." The sister cursed him even more and said that she would come with him, as next month he was getting married. She must come to weep over his dead body. The boy was very surprised and thought about what had come over his sister. She seemed to have gone quite mad.

When they reached home, their mother said, "So you brought your sister along". She said, "Yes, I have to weep over his dead body". Everyone was surprised to hear a real sister curse a boy whom no one had ever cursed. Anyway, the day of the wedding arrived.

When the marriage procession was about to start, the sister said, "I will not let it go through the door, it must go through the wall; so break the wall". Everyone was surprised but the elders suggested to listen to this crazy woman. As soon as they broke the wall and got the groom out, the door collapsed. Everyone started saying that look, this mad woman has saved everyone.

Next, when the marriage procession reached the girl's house, everyone started putting carpets in the shade of a tree to sit

down. The sister again said, "I will not let him sit in the shade; he must sit in the sun". Everyone again started calling her mad, but the elders advised them to listen to her. As soon as the boy sat in the sun, the tree fell. Everyone said that she was a little mad but also sensible.

When the boy started to go for his marriage ritual, the sister pretended to be sleeping. Everyone said it was good that she was sleeping, otherwise she would go there, curse the groom and put everyone to shame. When everyone had gone for the wedding, the sister took a saucer of milk and a needle and thread and sat near her brother's shoes. When the serpent came it started drinking the milk and the sister quickly threaded its nose with needle and thread. The snake died immediately. She then went to sleep. After his wedding, when the boy came to wear his shoes, he found the dead snake. Everyone was greatly surprised.

When they woke up the mad woman, she started talking in a normal way. She then brought her brother and sister-in-law home. Her mother asked her as to what had happened to her. She told her mother everything. She had pretended to be mad to save her brother's life. She then asked permission to go her home back. Her mother, brother and sister-in-law were very happy and sent her home with great affection.

After this story is told the sister will go and throw the grains (gram) in an attic or elsewhere where the rats are likely to eat them. Then the *patashe* are given to the brothers to eat. The sister then annoints (*tika*) her brother and puts sweet meats in his mouth. The brother then gives a cash gift to his sister, anything between Rs 2/-and Rs 101/-, according to his capacity. Married sisters usually get twice the amount that an unmarried one would get. Sometimes it is agreed that the brother will give a gift of, say, a suit length, a watch or gold chain to his sister. It all depends upon his capacity to give.

After this the brother and sister eat together, the food having been cooked by the sister herself. Married sisters usually cook the food in their affinal home and bring it to their brothers' house. The brother and sister may even eat from the same plate. This is the only occasion when an elder brother may eat food that is from his sisters' affinal home. This ritual is so important that, symbolically, even a month-old child will

undergo the ritual. Also, if a child is without a brother or a sister, a cousin will step in; and, if no cousin is at hand then the pundit's (son or daughter) will step in to play the part of a brother or sister, as the case be. It is said that on this day not a single man's forehead should be without an annointment.

Kartik Purnima: On the fifteenth *sudi* Kartik is Kartik Purnima. It is the full moon of the month of Kartik. The girls and the women go and bathe at the nearby river, lake or well.

Sakat Chauth: On the fourth *vadi* Magh is Sakat Chauth. A goddess for women, Sakat Mata, is worshipped on this day by fasting, telling her story and performing a ritual.

Basant Panchami : On the fifth *sudi* Magh is Basant Panchami. Saraswati, the goddess of learning, is prayed to on this day. It is her birth day. It is customary on this day to eat yellow-coloured rice and wear yellow-coloured clothes.

Mahashivratri: On the thirteenth *vadi* Phagun is Mahashivratri. The day is consecrated to the worship of Shiva and his wife, Mother Parvati. The Lord is on this day most powerful in the symbol Shiva Lingam. Prayers are offered. A fast is to be kept. The day is of special significance for beseaching the Lord in marital matter. A desire for a good husband may be expressed or a son may be asked for. The Rudrabhishek is performed at night. The various gods and goddesses in the Shivalaya are washed in water, milk, curd, honey; and offerings of fruits, leaves, sweets and opium are 'fed' to the gods.

Holi: On the fifteenth *sudi* Phagun is Holi. It corresponds to the full moon of Phagun, the last month of the Hindu calender.

Just as Rakhi is the festival of Brahmins, Dussehera that of Kshatriyas and Diwali that of Vaishyas, Holi is the festival of Shudras, but like the other festivals mentioned, it is celebrated by all the Hindus.

The burning of Holi is a ritual that celebrates the burning of Holika and the survival of Prahlad. There are three parts to the ritual. The first is the ritual in which a log-fire is set up, called the burning of Holi, which is done around 8.30 P.M. on Holi; the second part consists of religious activity done on the day of Holi; and the third part is the colour festivities on the day next to the burning of Holi and is sometimes called "Dhulandi". Sometimes the day of burning is called *Chhoti*

Holi and the day of throwing colours called *Bari Holi.*

The burning of Holi is organized by neighbourhood who collect together, pool in some of their own money and collect some money from others. The logs are piled near a crossing, some hay is placed in between them and some of it is wound around the pile. Garlands of marigold and strings of tennicoit size cowdung rings are hung here and there on the pile of logs, and white cotton thread is would around the pile. Some five to ten gas balloons may be tied to the pile or a short staff with a red flag may be put on the top.

The pundit begins the ritual by first performing a small *puja* in which he lights a *diya*: and in another earthen (lamp) vessel he keeps rice, grains, *roli*, some red rose petals, *patashe* and split beans. He lights the fire and offers these items to the pyre. The collected gathering then goes round the fire three or five times and the pundit annoints the participants. While going round the fire, the participants shout in unison "Shankar Bhagwan ki jai", "Ganga Mai ki jai", "Bhagat Prahlad ki jai", "Saccha Prahlad ki jai". (*Ki Jai* means praise be.) The red flag atop the pyre is not allowed to be burnt and taken off before it catches fire.

Some people burn camphor tablets in an earthen lamp and offer it to the pyre. Many old unusable items at home may be thrown into the fire.

People take bushels of green gram, parch them in the fire and take them home. Some people take the burning ambers in shovel to their houses, where they would roast bushels of green gram over them. The pods of green gram (*Chholia*) are taken from the bushel and offered to the kinsmen and friends. This *chholia* is the *prasad* on the occasion and sometimes people will exchange one pod each among themselves; this is called Holi Milan. All in all, the burning of Holi is mainly a men's affair. Sometimes the organizers may distribute some sweets (*burfee* or *patashe*); people may embrace each other; and occasionally, while lighting the fire, the pundit may offer *samagri* to the pyre. The younger people touch the feet of older people who bless them with a long life but, sometimes, even elders may touch the feet of children who are expected to bless the elders with happiness and long life.

While the actual burning of the Holi is normally a men's affair: prior to the burning of Holi, women too worship it. Women come (they normally come in batches of 2 or 3), and bring their offerings on a brass plate. A woman first offers a garland of cow-dung cakes, then offers water from a *lota*, ties a white thread around the Holi and annoints the Holi with turmeric powder, offers some wheat flour and sweets and finally goes around the fire five times sprinkling water on it, and in the end says *namaskar* by first touching Holi and then her forehead. Children accompany their parents, wearing bright (sometimes new) clothes with garlands of *phool makhane* or small round biscuits with a toy tied at one end. Some devotees also light a lamp near the Holi. The flour and sugar (or jaggery) contained in the brass plate (used for worship) is then given to a pundit, along with coins of small denomination, 5 paise or 10 paise.

The other ritual activity on the day of the burning of Holi may include reading of the Ramayana or part thereof, after which the members of the household touch one another's feet. Some more rituals may be performed, but these are essentially private or may be magical in nature such as placing ritual objects at a road crossing. This may take the form of taking ritual materials such as a *diya*, an earthen vessel or a leaf cup, in which is placed husked rice grains, a sweet like *laddu* or *patashe*, red rose petals, and even half-cooked rice or half-cooked *moong daal*, cloves, betel leaf, betel nut, coins, yoghurt *patashe*, silver foil, and placing them on a crossing and pouring water near to it and standing back and offering prayers.

Whatever ritual materials are placed at cross-roads, soon get knocked about even though people take care not to tread on them to avoid any evil effect that might result from the magic. The day after the Holi, the scavenger or *bhangi* sweeps all these materials away.

There is also some religious activity in the temples, where religious and pop music is played and a few people gather in the evening to sing religious songs. Most people visit the temple.

Holi is a festival in which coloured water and dry colours are thrown on everyone. Everyone mixes with everyone else, people embrace freely, visit the neighbours, everyone is offered sweets, and old enmities are forgotten. Everyone is supposed to

participate freely in the celebrations, irrespective of age and relationship. Most of the barriers of interaction that exist in daily life are broken down at the time of Holi. Hierarchies are levelled down; there is supposedly brotherhood, equality and harmony. Nobody is supposed to mind any pranks played on him. Old and young, rich and poor are supposed to be levelled out in the blanket of colours and merry-making.

The significance of Holi is evident from its mythology. Hiranakashyapa, the father of Prahlad, and his sister Holika, are demons (*Rakshasa*) and are thus symbolic of conflict. As is well-demonstrated in mythology, the *rakshasas* are always associated with wanton destruction, disturbances or conflict in general. The destruction of Holika represents the elimination of the forces of conflict and the triumph of the child Prahlad is the triumph of the power of love of God. Holi is thus a festival of peace-making, of settling of old quarrels. Throwing coloured water and colours is symbolic of love. It is also expressed in the myths of Radha and Krishna playing Holi, along with the *gopis* on the banks of the river Jamuna. Traditionally, Holi was played with water coloured with the pollen of the *tesu* or *palash* flower which is symbolic of love.

The brotherly feelings on Holi imply equality, but in a hierarchial society equality itself is anti-social. It is not surprising that Holi is celebrated in anti-social ways.

Morning-to-noon is a period of general licence to throw coloured water and powders on others. In actual practice, any-thing is used, especially where passers by are concerned, ranging from paint, shoe-polish, dung, or in extreme cases human faeces.

Numerous processions are taken out to the tune of beating drums and dancing. Studipidty and tomfoolery is the order of the day. On one occasion a prominent state politician had his face blackened and was made to ride a donkey, his face toward the tail. A placard, hung by his side, read "King of Donkeys".

Sexual license is no longer common as it was in the fifties when nude women usually prostitutes, painted in multicolours, danced at the head of processions, and some men, dancing in the procession, displayed their genital organs which were often specifically painted for the occasion.

In the days before Holi, sexual license does occur. Prostitutes openly invoke customers by calling out from their windows, sometimes sticking out nude portions of their body. In some villages, it is the women who run riot. With sticks and stones, they are ready to beat the headman of the highest caste. Men may also find an opportunity for sexual abuse or even rape. Opium is popularly consumed during these days, especially on the day colours are thrown. In the afternoon everyone goes home to clean up.

With the passing over of the festival, the new year dawns again and the cycle of rituals begins all over again. There are some new participants each year and some drop out, they are dead and gone. During the year there are some other occassions as well for rituals. These relate to life-cycle ceremonies; a Hindu must perform his rituals as they are part of the *dharma* of the Hindu and part of his faith in being a Hindu.

LIFE CYCLE CEREMONIES

Right from birth to death, life is marked by a series of rituals directly connected with the passage from one phase of life to another.

Soul is the substance of life, and although sexual cohabitation of a man and woman is a condition, is not all that is required for the birth of a child. In the ultimate, children are the will of God.

When a woman knows she is pregnant she stops putting on *bindi* (coloured dot put in the centre of the forehead by women, usually married ones). She will now not put on any new clothes or bangles.

In the seventh month of her pregnancy she wears a new *saree*, puts on new bangles and applies all her make up which is sent to her by her father or brother. She then ceremoniously sits with the womenfolk who put small gifts in her lap.

The birth of a child, especially that of a son and that too of a first son, is cause for much thanks-giving in the family. The time of the birth is noted so that the astrologer can prepare the child's horoscope. The child will be named according to the positions of the planets at the moment of its birth.

In the horoscope the course of the child's future will be set out in a kind of charter, detailing his/her achievements and

pitfalls. The astrologer can offer remedies for situations, destined for the individual, that are best avoided in the course of life.

At the time of the birth of a child the women sing songs in a loud voice in order to wake up Bemata, the deity who is to write the destiny of the new-born child.

A father's ideas about a good and happy life revolve around a good son, who is morally upright, obedient, respectful, and who will later take over the responsibilities of providing economic support to the household. For a mother the birth of a son, especially the first son, is a time for rejoicing, for the woman has now achieved one of her prime tasks in life.

The feelings which accompany the birth of a girl depend upon the baby's position in the order of children. If the birth of a baby girl has been preceded by two or more boys and especially if the household feels that there has been a paucity of females in the household, it will be an occasion for rejoicing, but if she is the third or fourth in a succession of girls born, then her arrival may be greeted with mixed feelings. The mother of the new-born can only resign herself to her *kismat* (fate). She seeks justification in the will of God. Her mother-in-law may not, however, see it in the same light. The mother-in-law may curse and blame the woman for the plight of the household.

Without a son the family line cannot continue and daughters bring with them the responsibility of dowering them. The mood of the household is reflected in the treatment meted out to the mother and the child.

The baby is dressed in old clothes. New clothes on a child express happiness which, given the high rate of infant mortality, could be short-lived. The old clothes may have to be borrowed from kinsfolk.

The news of the birth is sent to all the kinsmen and close friends, by word of mouth, carried either by a member of the houshold or the barber. The child's mother's parents are informed by the barber who takes along a gift of sweets and a postcard on which the news of birth is written down and which is marked yellow with turmeric paste. This is one of the few occasions when a gift is sent by a man's household to that of his wife's.

The father is allowed to see his child only when the astrologer has been consulted as to the proper and most auspicious time for the same, otherwise the son may prove unlucky for the father. If the astrologer feels that the child may prove dangerous to the father, than to obviate the danger, he may prescribe such ritual, as necessary, to be performed, before the father can see his child.

Care is taken to avoid an evil eye. The child's face may be marked with a spot or dash of kohl; he may be frequently spat at, may be shabbily clothed, or frequently abused. The old clothes on the baby also help to avoid evil eye.

When the child is considered to be good-looking, the danger of the evil eye of strangers or jealous acquaintances is greater.

When a child is born, it is customary to attempt to see if there is any resemblance or symptom of similarity between the child and any of his kin. If some similarity is recognized between the child and one of his dead kin, it is construed that particular kin had taken rebirth in his own kin-group.

Chhattipujan: The importance of the new-born in the household is beyond doubt great, but no ceremony is performed until the child enters a decisive stage in life, and this is the sixth day after birth. The occasion calls for worship performed by the pundit and invocations, by the parents, of the blessings of the gods. This is a ceremony to which only close kinsmen are invited and, that too, only if they are near enough to conveniently attend.

The ceremony is called *chhattipujan*, literally meaning the worship of the sixth day. On this day a figure of 'Bemata' made of cow-dung is worshipped, the younger brother-in-law (husband's younger brother) brings out the mother, and she is given cash gifts of the denomination of Rs. 21/- to Rs. 101/- by the kin.

There is an increasing tendency to perform this ceremony within 40 days of the birth of the child and then it coincides with the naming ceremony of the child. The naming ceremony is performed for boys as described, but for girls the ritual is usually in a low key and may be a private household matter.

Naming ceremony: The astrologer can determine the auspicious day for the performance of the ceremony by consulting

the horoscope of the boy. The first letter of the name of the child is also determined from the horoscope. The pundit gives the first letter and the members of the household suggest names beginning with that letter; ultimately a consensus may emerge. Name-giving is a sacrosanct sanskritic ritual to which all relatives, friends and neighbours are invited. Sometimes invitations are sent by printed cards.

A *puja* is performed which principally involves the pundit, the parents of the child and child's father's mother. The father and mother sit alongwith the pundit. The father or sometimes father's mother holds the son in the lap. The name of the child is first whispered in its ear while holding a betel leaf to the ear. The priest leads the sanskritic ritual in which he details the names of the close kin of the child, then invokes, turn by turn, the blessing of fire, a planetary bodies and individual gods by offering prayers to them and then announces the name by which the child is to be known and finally annoints the agnates of the child.

The worship is followed by a feast in which all guests, participate. Small cash presents ranging from Rs. 2/- to Rs. 101/- are given by the guests, depending on what kind of relationship each one maintains in such matters with the household concerned. Often it is strictly reciprocal and a note is made of the exact amount of gift given by an invitee. After forty days the mother takes a bath and goes to the temple. Thereafter she resumes normal chores.

Mundan or Head Shaving: The next ritual in the life cycle of a male is the head-shaving ceremony or *mundan*. This is appropriately performed on or around the first, third or fifth birthday of the boy. Another viewpoint is that the head-shaving ceremony should be held before the child is one year old or after he has attained the age of three. This is a ritual in which family tradition plays an important part. It principally involves the ritual shaving of the hair from the boy's head. The shaving of the head is interpretted differently by different people and it is a common belief that the hair on the child's head (that were associated with the mother's womb) are to be discarded, for new, good, strong hair that would then emerge. The ceremony is also supposed to coincide with the boy having thence come under the influence of his father or the beginning of the learn-

ing process for the boy. It may be noted that all these meanings of the ceremony involve a change within the household itself, in contrast to the beginning of the formal process of schooling, which involves the larger society.

The *mundan* ceremony is usually performed at an ancestral place to which the family is originally known to belong. Sometimes the place is not a place of origin, but a fixed place where the head-shaving ceremony of the males born in the household is customarily performed, such as a particular temple, village well or bank of a holy river. In the ceremony, the priest recites *mantras*, offers *samagri* and ghee to the fire, performs a *puja*, and then the barber shaves off the hair from the boy's head. This is followed by a discourse by the pundit. The child usually cries during the shaving of the head. Close relatives present make their usual cash gifts and the child is clothed in adult-style clothes, made to his size, which usually include turban with a coronet and a sword. These clothes are provided by the mother's brother. The ceremony is followed by a meal or refreshments of which everyone partakes before leaving.

School-going ceremony: For the children, school-going starts at the age of two to five. On the morning of the first day of school, the mother takes the child to the temple in the morning where an offering is made to the gods. Back at home, sweet meats are distributed to the neighbours and kinsmen living nearby. Sometimes, *kheer* with saffron in it is distributed. The child is also made to do *pranam* in front of goddess Saraswati.

Marriage: When the son or daughter comes to a suitable age, he/she is to be married. Marrying off one's children is primarily the duty of the parents. The marriage of a daughter into as good a household as possible is the pious obligation of the father. It is his ritual duty.

To the man a wife is necessary for continuing his lineage, and she is also a life-time companion. Marriage is, ritually speaking, indissoluble and the unity of a marriage is ritually reinforced and is supposed to continue upto the world beyond. A wife is a man's *ardhangani* half i.e. a husband and wife are not a pair but two parts of a whole. A man seeks wealth outside the house and his wealth at home is his wife called Grih

Lakshmi or household wealth. A man and his wife form a potentially independent social unit.

The man's responsibility towards his wife and future of children is not only economic but also social, for his actions and deeds concern his children. In turn, the father is charged with the responsibility of bringing them up as conforming members of society. Young boys who have a questioning attitude towards the relevance of rituals, mellow and develop a more tolerant attitude with their own marriage. Conformity increases as a man is saddled with the task of bringing up his own children. In order that a man is completely free to pursue his economic interests, it is vital for him that the behaviour of the members of his household towards others conforms to cultural standards, whose wide acceptance permits him the time to devote himself freely to the task of earning a livlihood.

To the woman, a husband is the object of her life. Being a wife and a mother is the end of her life, that is all she can possibly become. Marriage, in fact, is vitally important for her; it is also the avenue by which she can achieve her values of dress and adornment in which she rejoices and which are a source of great pleasure to her.

The celebration of marriage is a gala affair. The marriage procession goes from the bridegroom's house to the bride's where the marriage rite is performed. In the procession the bridegroom rides a mare or even a charriot drawn by mock horses. The charriot is lit with power bulbs and tube light. The other processionists, the kinsfolk and friends, proceed on foot alongwith the dancers, musicians and bearers holding incandescent lamps.

At the bride's house, the relatives of the bride meet those of the groom. A poem commemmorating the wedding is read out. The bride's mother annoints the groom and does his *aarti*, and then the bride and groom garland each other. All the guests eat their food.

The groom and the bride, their respective parents and pundits proceed to the courtyard of the house where the canopy of banana plants and flowers has been erected for the marriage rite. Beneath it sit the priests, the bride, the groom and their parents. A religious diagram is drawn on the ground depicting

the *grahas*. Ganesh puja is done by the bride's pundit who mainly conducts the ceremony.

The *puja* involves invoking the blessings of all the *grahas*, the important gods and goddesses, and offerings of flowers, rice, milk, honey, sweets and other ritual items.

The pundit puts turmeric on the bride's hand and gives her hand to the groom. They then symbolically break shoots of grass.

Now the fire is lit, offerings are made to it, and the couple go seven times round the fire, the bride leading in three rounds and the groom in four rounds. All the while the pundit recites *mantras*. Each round represents a promise made to each other about love, devotion and duty.

The couple are now married and the priests are given their cash gifts. The newly-wed are now taken away to play games. These games include finding a ring in a dish of coloured water or the newly-wed groom trying to kick an earthen glass while the bride's kin try to move it away with a stick.

Meanwhile, the women kin of the groom, who have not accompanied the marriage party, are playing games too, i.e. in the brides house. The ladies arrange a mock marriage, recite the dialogue of newly-weds, when they first cohabit, or even imitate them in the sexual act.

The next morning the groom and bride, along with the dowry gifts, come back to the grooms's house in a transport bedecked with flowers. Games are also played at the groom's house and there is much singing. The newly-weds are going to cohabit the night after the next day.

The consummation of a marriage creates a new relationship between two families which were, generally speaking, hitherto unrelated. The relationship is unequal, for the woman's family considers itself and is also otherwise considered lower than the man's.

After marriage a woman is supposed to identify herself with the new household in ideology and interests, so much so that she is expected to fall in instant love with all the children as well as to work hard and remain amicable in all circumstances. Similarly, a man is charged with the responsibility of the women to whom he is bound in a life-long union of ritual,

economic and social cooperation in richness or poverty, in joys and sorrows.

Death : The last ritual to be performed for an individual is after his death. The dead body is laid out on the ground covered with a white sheet and white shawl. Water is sprinkled on the dead body or it is given a bath. Sometimes water from the river Ganga, water from a basil leaf, a bit or pieces of sandalwood, gold and ghee are put in the mouth of the corpse. The younger people touch his feet. He is put on a cot and is carried a funeral procession to the cremation ground. The sons and close relatives take turns at carrying the cot. The sons of the deceased shave off the hair from their heads.

If the deceased had reched a ripe old age, say 80 years, then his carriage may be decorated with balloons and flowers and the procession may be accompanied by music. The eldest son lights the funeral pyre and he is the centre of the death ceremonies that follow.

At the cremation ground the body is laid out and the son circumbulates it three times carrying a pitcher with some water in it. At the end, he stands towards the head of the deceased and breaks the pitcher.

The body is taken and put on a hearth. Piles of wood are placed on it. The pundit recites *mantras* and the son, after going round the dead body, gives fire to it. When the body is half-consumed a bamboo is taken and smashed on the head of the deceased. The skull is thus broken. When the body is substantially burnt, everyone comes away. At the exit of the cremation grounds, everyone takes a shoot of grass in his hand, sits down with his back to the cremation ground and throws the grass back over his head.

On the third day after the death, the sons go and collect the ashes of the father and immerse them in the holy river. Sweet rice is prepared and fed to the kites and crows in the cremation ground. An earthen pitcher filled with water is tied to a *peepal* tree. The sons collect the bones in an urn, takes them to the banks of the holy river Ganges at Hardwar and ceremoniously immerses them in the river. Here the *pinda dan* or body part gift is done. The body has been consigned to fire, the air has consumed its fumes, the river has taken the ashes; now five rice balls (called *pinda* representing the five parts of

the body, head, arms, torso, genitals) and legs are dug into the earth as a ritual offering. Sometimes another set of balls is offered to the river or water.

The next ceremony that is to be performed is called *uthavani* when all those who knew the deceased are expected to come and sit down in rememberance of the dead for about half an hour. This too can be performed on the third day.

On the tenth day gifts are given to the pundit at the crema-tion ground.

This is followed by a *Kriya* ceremony which brings to an end the period of mourning. In this ceremony all friends, relations and acquaintance are expected to collect at the appointed time and day, at the household of the deceased which is either the 13th or 17th day after the day of death.

In this ceremony a *puja* is performed by the priest. The son performs the worship of fire and, then, gifts are given to the pundit; these consist of all clothes (full set), bedding (complete with quilt, blanket, pillows, etc.), gold, walking stick, lantern (or torch), umbrella and cash.

After the *puja* the son has a bath and wears new clothes which come from his in-laws. A turban is tied on his head and annointment is performed with coins. The widow also has a bath, wears new clothes, and her brother puts gold bangles on her and all elders put cash gift or gold ornaments in her lap. A meal may be given to all the persons who attend the ceremony. Eating at a death ceremony is compulsory if a feast is offerred, and only persons who are older to the person died, do not partake of the food. *Laddu* and *kachori* are an essential part of the feast. In conversation during the meal, people often abuse the deceased.

The *puja* is followed by a discourse in which the pundit explains the nature of death and its consequences for the household. The pundit asks the eldest son to step into the shoes of his father and bear all the responsibilities of the household, including the looking-after of the household, especially his widowed mother.

During the period of mourning, it is customary for the family and friends to remember the goodness of the deceased, specifically in a religious sense. Thus it may be remembered how he started life from scratch and built himself into a wealthy

man, or how the deceased had said or understood that his end was coming, shown by his having visited the temple and met his friends or having performed other ritual actions.

Continuing ritual status of the father as a giver and bene-factor is symbolised by giving money for the construction of a part of a temple or *dharamshala*. A plaque is usually put on the construction showing who had given money for the construction and in whose memory. Sometimes, a wife may give charity in this way, commemorating the memory of the husband, or vice-versa, or an elder brother may do the same for a younger brother.

At the death of a woman, the ceremonies performed are the same as in the case of a man; except that there is no question of the sons taking on the responsibilities of the mother.

Chapter Six

DHARMA : PURITY AND POLLUTION

The rationale for the social practices are in the key idea of *dharma* which defines the ritual duties of man towards God, and those actions ordained by God as good and righteous. *Dharma* comprises the norms and rules that a person must follow in a life-time of ritual living. Each person has a ritual position depending upon his *varna*, caste, calling, age and sex. *Dharma* is not a blanket category identical for everyone; it is specific for each individual depending upon his or her ritual position and the circumstances in which he/she is placed. The *dharma* of a woman or the *dharma* of a thief includes such acts as are befitting a woman or a thief but not anyone else.

Dharma serves to resolve contradiction as to what is right and what is wrong? For example, a woman must obey her husband. If he asks her to do something that is otherwise considered wrong, it is still right for her to do it. Her duty to him demands it. To steal is in itself wrong but even a thief has his code of conduct which is his *dharma*. The act of stealing is not as bad as going against one's '*dharma* as a thief'. *Dharma* follows the divisions in society.

Society follows the pattern set by the cosmological phenomena. This is basically an expression of the continuity of natural and social phenomena, for all universe is one, merged into the ultimate Brahma. Cosmos is divided into four parts. The day is divided into four parts, *Subah* (morning), *Dopahar* (afternoon), *Sham* (evening) *Rat* (night). The days are arranged according to seasons that are four in number, viz. *garmi* (summer), *varsha* (monsoon), *sardi* (winter) and *vasant* (spring).

The four divisions into which society is divided are the four *varnas*, namely Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. As myth goes, the four *varnas* originated from four parts of the Brahma's body. The Brahmins are from the head, the

Kshatriyas from the arms, the Vaishyas from the belly (or thighs or arm-pits), and the Shudras from the feet. The head, arms, belly and feet form a ritual hierarchy, giving a ritual scale to the four *varnas*. The highest point, the head, is the purest and the feet, the least pure or most impure.

The three highest *varnas* symbolize their ritual purity, as compared to the Shudras, by wearing the sacred thread (*Janeu*). The *varna* classification is also a basis for occupational specialization.

The Brahmin serves in the purest of professions, being so near divinity. He is also the guardian of the ritual and moral order of society. The Kshatriya is the ruler and the warrior. He uses the strength of his arms and his weapons to preserve and protect. The Brahmin takes care of the other world, while the Kshatriya takes care of people in this world itself. In his work a Kshatriya, especially king or ruler, is closely associated with the Brahmin priests or *purohits* who were attached to all kingly courts. The Vaishya is the trader and provider of food. The Shudras come last. They do manual work and handle impure things such as faeces, dirty clothes, dead animals. Their state of pollution is so perpetual as to render them impure or untouchable for ever.

The *varna* classification becomes operational through *dharma*. Each of the four major *varnas* has its broad outline of conduct and occupation, and to follow it is to follow the dictates of caste and rank, purity and pollution, and associated cultural ideals. These ideals include wisdom of the Brahmin, valour of the Kshatriya, thriftiness of the Vaishya, and the skill of the Shudhra.

The Brahmin, the religious practitioner combines the roles of temple priest; a suggester for methods to propitiate and appease gods and goddesses, and for suggesting magical potents and prescriptions and for remedies to ill-luck; he is a fortune teller, a family advisor and, as if that is not enough, a match-maker in marriages.

The role of the Brahmin as a pundit is popularly known by his calling, can be broken up into *purohit* and *pujari*. The traditional *purohit* of a family or of a king, differs from a *pujari* in that the former is not only a pundit but he has

desired the welfare of a particular family or king from a long time and over the generations.

The *purohit* has the responsibility of maintaining the lineage traditions of his patron, and if at any time there is a break in the tradition (as would be likely to happen if at any time, due to deaths, the remaining males in the household are only minor), he must give his advice and consolidate the family and try to pass on the lineage traditions to the growing-up generation. In addition, the responsibility of performing the last rites of the former king were not of his son but of the *raj purohit* of the kingdom. Further, it was his duty to recognize and set the heir of the late king on the throne.

He has knowledge to give and he may be called *Acharya* meaning ideally behaved. He is instrumental in seeing through marriages, births, deaths or crisis in family relations. The *purohit* must be a guide for life-cycle ceremonies such as nomenclature, *mundan* and thread-wearing ceremonies for a boy and nomenclature and ear-piercing ceremony for a girl. Some children are born under *graha*, signs that are inauspicious either for them or their kin, e.g. father or mother. The *purohit* has to prescribe remedies or atonements as the case may be divined. Then, after death he must have the *pinda dan* or offerings of rice balls performed.

With every family there should be a *purohit* whose work is to see the family overcomes difficulties, when there is sickness in the family, or there is great difficulty in achieving something like betrothing a girl of the family, or the business is suffering a loss, or a person may be finding it hard to get a job. Then the *purohit* must prescribe and conduct, if proper, the correct *pujas* and rituals.

All Brahmins are capable of becoming pundits but being a *purohit* is another thing. The *purohit* does not have to himself conduct the rituals nor does he have to offer daily prayers at the house of his patron. He must organise all this. In the event of the son of a *purohit* not taking on brahminical learning, he still remains a *purohit* because (he has learnt from his father and) he knows of the lineage traditions of the family his father had served. The *purohit* is then (in a way) another member of his patron's family. It is the duty of the patron to see that the *purohit's* wants are satisfied; that he has food and clothes not only

for himself but also for his family; that he has enough money to be able to perform rituals in style in his own family, and that his daughter does not remain unmarried for want of dowry.

Thus the *dharma* of the Brahmin lies in protecting the spiritual interest of his patrons, in giving advice on any matters relating to the divine and worldly matters as well. The reciprocal obligations of the patrons, comprising the Kshatriya and Vaishya *varnas'* lies in protecting the Brahmin and the cow, and in honouring and providing for material needs of the Brahmins and the cows.

A Kshatriya is associated with strength and valour. Traditionally they are rulers and soldiers engaged in warfare and protection of masses. Drinking liquor, eating meat, living well and generously, are all accepted norms of the Kshatriya. A Kshatriya is not supposed to turn down any appeal for help. To protect is his *dharma*, specially protection of the weaker castes like Brahmins and Vaishyas, and the helpless such as women and dependents.

A Kshatriya is expected to be strong and aggressive, generous to the point of being spendthrift, honest, a staunch keeper of his word. It is said that a promise made by a Kshatriya is never broken. In Ramayana, king Dasaratha, a Kshatriya, when confronted by Kaikeyi to grant her three boons, says a famous couplet often quoted for a Kshatriya: "Raghukul reet sada chali aayee, pran jaye per vachan na jayee". It means: in Raghukul it has always been the tradition that one may give up one's life but never one's promise.

Appropriately, a Kshatriya worships Durga and Kali; martial forms of the mother goddess. The worship may even take the form of offering sacrifices of animals and libation of liquor. For a Kshatriya, eating meat and drinking liquor are part of his life style, his *dharma*. These foods are taboo for the other twice-born *varnas*.

Traditionally, Kshatriya children, specifically boys but sometimes even girls were trained in the martial arts. Women were encouraged to be brave and a support to their husbands in time of distress. History is replete with stories of Kshatriya women taking up arms to defend their honour. It was not at all inappropriate or contrary to norms for a Kshatriya women to ride a horse or don men's clothes to enter the battlefield; actions

which would be considered totally immoral and against societal norms for women of any other *varna*. In Mahabharata we have Chitrangada and Shikhandi, both princesses, trained in warfare just like men and performing bravely in battle. Historical figures such as Maharani Lakshmibai of Jhansi conform to such ideals.

The traditional identification of the Vaishya, popularly called *baniya* is with the occupation of trade and commerce, a calling religiously followed by many of them even today. One of the important cultural ideals of the *baniya* is thrift. Thrift implies that goods are denied to one's self and one's family members, even if one has the capacity to purchase them. A spend thrift nature is considered immoral, it is against the *dharma* of the *baniya*. For a *baniya*, to undergo physical hardship and to subject himself to extremes of restraint in terms of consumption is part of his life, and this the *baniya* children are taught from childhood.

Right from their infancy, these children are taught to curtail consumption, not to ask for expensive foods or clothes, not to spend too much time in play, but to be useful around the house. Girls, more than boys, are taught to be restricted even in their movements, voice and laughter.

Accumulating money by pinching pennies is another norm to which the baniya strives. Nobody is surprised to see even a *baniya* millionaire wearing a dirty *dhoti* for it is his *dharma* to be a miser. In fact, if a *baniya* started living ostentatiously or did something really outrageous like becoming a poet, many eyebrows would be raised. The person would be considered a sacriledge to his caste group, and going against his *varna* and its *dharma*.

It is thus befitting that *Lakshmi* (goddess of wealth) is one of the most important deities for the *baniya*. A myth relates as to how Lakshmi has a natural affinity for the *baniya*. Lakshmi went at night to the houses of the member of each *varna*. Except the *baniya* the rest were too sleepy to welcome her. The *baniya* entertained her and gave her an honourable place.

Non-violence is another important norm. A *baniya* is not expected to show physical aggression. Any kind of violence on

the part of the *baniya* is immoral. By their norms they do not eat meat, fish or eggs, and also do not touch liquor.

Thus in case of *dharma* and its relationship to different *varnas* it can be truly said that what is one man's meat is another man's poison. Thus, *dharma* is a situational concept applying differently to different persons. Not only *varna* and caste but sex and age also serve to distinguish *dharma*. What is appropriate and normative for a particular age group or sex is taboo or immoral for others. Thus, when a child plays pranks and generally makes a nuisance of himself, indulgent adults may say, it is his *dharma* to be naughty. When a snake bites, it may be said that it is the snake's *dharma* to bite.

For a woman, the supreme *dharma* is to serve her husband. In Hindu society there is no woman more meritorious than the loyal and faithful wife. It is also the duty of the wife to share her husband's occupation and be an appropriate wife to him befitting his social position. A Brahmin's wife should be learned, accomplished and beautiful. A Kshatriya's wife should be brave and encourage her husband in the performance of his duty; a *baniya's* wife should be thrifty and docile. A Shudra's wife should be hard-working and help her husband in his work. A woman should blindly obey and follow her husband and submit herself to all his wishes.

A woman was sitting with her husband's head in her lap. The husband was sleeping soundly. The woman's child was playing some distance away and began to crawl dangerously towards the fire. The woman thought, should she get up, disturb her husband's sleep, and go and save her child from burning itself from the fire, or should she let the child be burnt and not disturb her husband's sleep? This is a riddle and the devout is asked to answer. The correct answer is that the woman should not get up and disturb her husband to go and save the child. If she is doing her duty to her husband, God himself will look after the child and the child will turn away from the fire.

A man's duty is to look after the family, protect its members from harm and perform his appropriate duty in society. The last depends upon his caste and position. A husband need not obey his wife, but he is expected to keep her happy and protect her. He is also to provide for her and take up all responsibilities

such as looking after her in sickness. Both socially and ritually, however, the position of the man is higher than the woman; and though a wife is referred to as *ardhangani* that is 'half of the man', yet social norms dictate that she be submissive.

The only position in which a woman is higher than the man is as a mother. Society grants a very high position to the parents, both father and mother. Children are to obey and respect the wishes of their parents under all circumstances. Defying parents or hurting them in any way is going against one's *dharma*. To look after parents in their old age, to serve, respect and obey them is an act of great merit and brings a lot of merit. In Mahabharata we have the story of Bhishma who, for the sake of his father, put himself to life-long abstinence, and was blessed that he will die only when he wishes. Shrawan Kumar is a boy who carries his old parents in baskets, and takes them to various pilgrimage centres. This story is often retold.

Dharma is thus specific to every status and role in society, like the *dharma* of a king, of a soldier, of a priest. It is also time-bound and situational. In the battlefield, for instance, the *dharma* of a soldier is to fight and kill the enemy. In the field of battle there are no relationships and no other duties that should hinder the soldier in the performance of his task. Similarly, *dharma* changes with the ages. In every age (*yuga*) there is a *yuga-dharma*; what was right in Satyug, need not be right in Kalyug as well. Basically, it means that man must act according to the dictates of the time and the situation at hand. Man's *dharma* in Satyug was to perform rituals and sacrifice, in Kalyug it is primarily to do one's *karma*.

Each of the four *varnas* are associated with different degrees of purity, the Brahmins being the purest and the Shudras least pure, to the extent of being untouchable. Distance is maintained among the *varnas* through lack of commensality and social interaction. Persons of different *varnas* do not sit together to eat or share the same *hookah*. This differentiation extends to different caste groups arranged hierarchially within each *varna* and sometimes, even to sub-divisions within the same caste.

Through each of the upper three *varnas* maintain their social distance from each other, the mere touch of the Shudra is capable of causing pollution.

The concepts of purity and pollution extend beyond the

precincts of caste and every Hindu religiously maintains taboos of touch and social distance in day-to-day life.

What is understood as purity and pollution is basically a four-fold division between that which is clean and that which is dirty; that which is pure and that which is impure; that which can be touched and that which is not touched; and that which is *jhoothan* and that which is *suchaha*—the last-named pair referring to contamination by saliva, *jhoothan* being contaminated.

The basis of this classification is the sense-perceptions. Clean and dirty to the sense of sight; pure and impure to the sense of smell; and touch and no-touch to the sense of touch; and salival contamination being related to the sense of taste.

Within the household, the kitchen is basically *shuddh* (pure) area because dirt from the streets with its foul smells, coming by way of shoes of the people or otherwise, is not allowed to enter the kitchen. If perchance a child defeacates or urinates in the kitchen, the cleaning is almost immediately done, just as in a temple. The idea is that something that is *shuddh* has to be constantly kept clean. Women will bathe and wear clean clothes when they enter the kitchen to cook a meal and will not allow any child to come into the kitchen, so that she is not even touched by one. This further allows women to concentrate on the cooking without having to distract their attention.

Similar to the kitchen is the place earmarked for worship. Here, the taboo on touch does not strictly operate. Here or in the temple, the *prasad* offered to God, once it is touched to the God's mouth or otherwise offered to it, becomes contaminated by God, but remains very pure for human consumption. And so is the case with the other three classifications which are relative to the situation. In fact, goddess Parvati created a very pure being, that is Lord Ganesh, out of the dirt of her body.

The concept of contamination by taste is also applicable to commensality in the household. A man will not eat food that is tasted by anyone else and only his wife and children will eat in the plate contaminated by him.

The sphere of the household where the idea of *ashuddh* (impure) applies is the latrine which is so impure that one has to take bath after coming out of it, and the clothes worn while defecating have to be washed.

The scavenger or *bhangi* who comes to clean the foul-smelling latrine is also an impure being of the Shudra *varna* and not to be touched. Others who engage in foul-smelling occupations such as leather workers (the *chamars*), consequently, fall into the same category as the *bhangi*. And analogously, those who are associated with other human excretions and cleanliness such as barbers (*nai*) and washerman (*dhobi*) are also Shudra. Further, all those who work in manual professions, in hard labour, get relegated to the Shudra fold which includes all artisans.

A wife is the complement to her husband. Both should have been brought up in similar ways. Thus, people must marry within the *varna*. This principle is extended to smaller caste groups within the *varna* as well. The castes belonging to higher *varnas* are divided for purpose of marriage into 4, 8 or 18 divisions called *gotra*. A person belongs to the *gotra* of his or her father. A sacred duty of all Hindus is to marry according to dictates of *varna*, caste and *gotra*. One must marry within the *varna* or caste but outside the *gotra*. A *sagotra* (within *gotra*) marriage is against *dharma*, for all persons belonging to the same *gotra* are supposed to have descended from the same ancestor. It is the man's *gotra* or the father's *gotra* that is crucial, though in some caste groups mother's *gotra* may also be taken into account.

Thus *dharma* sets the norms of action in society. The actual deeds that a man may perform in society are, however, his *karma*, while *dharma* is the normative, *karma* is the actual repertory of actions performed by each individual. *Dharma* is to be understood at the level of the situation. *Karma* is measured according to the yardstick of *dharma*. Action conforming to *dharma* is right and good, while action going against *dharma* is wrong and bad. The *Karma* of an individual is the sum total of good and bad deeds performed in this world. *Dharma* and *Karma* are the basis of the theory of transmigration, viz. Birth-Death-Birth, and so on endlessly.

Whatever a man undergoes or gains in this world and the next is not a matter of choice or blind fate but meticulously measured out according to his *karma*. The cycle of reward and punishment is not confined to a single birth but, as the soul

passes through its various incarnations, it carries its *karma* with it. A man born in a good household and high caste is reaping the fruits of the *karma* of his previous incarnations.

For a practising Hindu, to do *karma* is to live according to his *dharma*, to accept his ascribed (caste) position in society and perform his duties to the best of his abilities. To show dissent against his position or place in society is not part of the Hindu course of action (*karma*), for any state, good or bad, is regarded as well deserved according to past *karma*. And one can presently do better *karma* and reap the fruits later, when the soul is reborn with a different *dharma*.

The so-called passivity of the Hindus lies not in his fatalism (belief in blind *kismat*) but in the expanded time-dimension in which he views himself. Time for the Hindu is practically limitless; what he is suffering today may be a result of sins committed much before his present existence. Similarly, what he may gain by righteous action may be rewarded to him in a later birth.

CHAPTER SEVEN

KARMA : PUN AND PAP

While *karma* is the sum total of a man's deeds, *punya* (*pun*) and *pap* are used to distinguish specific deeds as right and wrong, moral and immoral, the highly virtuous and the grossly wrong. They relate not only to action but also to intentions. All actions and intentions form a continuum with *pun* and *pap* clearly defined at the extremes *pun* and *pap* give a measure or scale. There are many actions that are neutral. In the middle ranges of this continuum, there is uncertainty or even difference of opinion about the nature of actions. Eating meat is considered wrong but there are differences about whether it would be *pap* for the person who is eating it, for he has not done the killing. Further, eating meat is normative for the Kshatriya and Shudra *varnas*.

The concepts of *pun* and *pap* do not encompass all that is good or bad, right or wrong, moral or immoral. Non-performance of all activities that beget *pun* does not necessarily mean that *pap* is incurred. Nor is it necessary that the opposite of a *pun* will be *pap*. A case in point is sacrilege.

A popular story goes that one person went everyday to worship God, while another person went habitually to throw a stone at the image of God. One day it rained heavily and a flood came. The person who offered prayers, decided not to go that day, but the other person was determined, and he braved the rain and flood to throw a stone at God. God appeared in person, was pleased and appreciated his determination and *niyam* (regularity, order, rule).

What is *pun*? What is *pap*? It will be seen that in most of the cases they coincide with the normative prescriptions or *dharma*, and these are broad guidelines to determine the answers to these questions. *Pap* would ensue from the killing of a man or animals, specially a Brahmin or a cow, the counterpart of the Brahmin in the animal world. It would be as great a

pap to cause injury to other living beings. A man may kill a snake or a dangerous animal without incurring *pap*, but killing ants would be *pap* and people often feed ants with wheat flour.

Pun comes from ritual activity such as going to the temple, fasting, offering money to God as well as by worship. Performance of prescribed ritual and knowledge and reading of holy scripture also brings *pun*.

It is considered *pun* to be charitable or help in building temples, *dharamshalas* (rest houses), schools, hospitals or dispensaries.

Helping the poor, feeding and taking care of birds, protecting and feeding cows and Brahmins is *pun*. Providing water for the thirsty, man, bird, or animal; giving aid to widows and orphans, or helping a girl to get married either by way of helping her with a dowry or being useful in the conduct of marriage negotiations; helping to resolve conflict are all acts of *pun*.

If an adult male allows an unmarried girl to touch his feet then it brings *pap*. *Pap* attaches to stealing, cheating, lying and causing mental or physical pain to others.

Keeping one's word or economic obligations such as paying a debt or failing in prestations could all come within the ambit of *pun* and *pap*. The injured party in each may say that the action is *pap* and the person who has violated the code is a *papi* or sinner.

In a family, *pun* is gained by an individual's service to the parents, especially the aged. Hitting at, or especially kicking a sister, is a great *pap*. Non-performance of ancestor-worship would be *pap*. Failing in familial duties such as getting a daughter married or a woman's failure to serve her husband or adultrous behaviour, would bring *pap*. One of the greatest *pap* is self-annhilation or suicide, for life belongs to the giver, God, and man has no right to take it.

To understand the nature of *pun* and *pap* as popularly understood, one may refer to a popular story about Shiva, which goes like this.

It was in the month of Shrawan. On the day of the full moon, Shiva and Parvati were sitting on the wayside while a religious story was being recounted nearby. In the story it

was recounted that even setting one foot in the (holy) river Ganges is equivalent to giving a gift of a thousand cows.

Parvati said, "Lord, you are telling a lie. Thousands and lakhs of poeple go to the river Ganges to bathe; from where will so many cows come?" Shiva replied, "Wait, I will give you an example about this." Shiva then took on the form of a leper, Parvati put on all her finery and make-up and both sat down, side by side.

A holy man came by, and he noticed that it was Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati sitting there. And so he said, "Lord, come to the Ganges to bathe; come to the Ganges to bathe". Shiva replied, "I am a leper; who is taking me to bathe in the Ganges? You take this one; she is like Parvati, all decked up, and she is of no use to me." The holy man replied, "She is Mother; she is my mother. I will definitely take you to bathe in the river Ganges." The holy man carried Shiva on his shoulders and started to walk. Parvati followed them.

After going some distance, Shiva urinated on the holy man. So Parvati said, "You are dirty, you have urinated on this man." The holy man said, "Mother, it does not matter, it was due to his (leper's) old age, I can wash myself."

Again they began to walk and after some distance Shiva defeacated. On this, Parvati said, "You are very dirty." "Lord", the holy man began to say, "Lord, it may have just happened. Mother, it does not matter, ahead I will have a bath."

Getting nearer the Ganges, when they were quite near (five or ten steps from) the Ganges, there was a small pond and the holy man saw the Ganges coming into it. He rolled Lord Shiva from his shoulders into the Ganges, Parvati also dropped into the Ganges, and he himself jumped in. Shiva's form turned gold, Parvati's clothes also turned gold and the devout's (holy man's) body became gold too. Now Lord Shiva said, "Parvati, the person whose *pun* (bathing in Ganges) is equivalent to the gift of a thousand cows is this person.

Pun and *pap* are encompassed within the concept of *dharma*. One must do one's duty in all situations. A man must accept whatever befalls him as a fact of fate or *kismat*; protest against one's own condition is a futile exercise.

Today, there is very little concern about *pun* and *pap*. The operational aspects of the idea are confined to religious

activity only. Few acts of *pun* and *pap* apply to social acts. *Dan* (giving gifts to other persons or the poor) is hardly practised. When a person gets something built in charity, it is usually in the memory of a deceased member of the household.

The changed attitude towards the concepts of *pun* and *pap* is illustrated by a joke which goes that a rich man was asked whether he would like to go to Swarag or Narak (equivalent to heaven and hell). His reply was that he would like to go to Narak because that is where all the film-stars and all the fun would be. In Swarag there will be all the do-gooders; it would be a dull and dry place.

This is to show the questioning mood of the people regarding these concepts. It is in the form of a riddle:—"One living being (a person) had a pond dug. Then Indra devta (the god of rain) willed it to rain and the pond filled up with water. Then, fish bred in the pond. Then, there was famine and the water dried up and the fish died. Now, tell me Seth (rich man) Pooram Chandjee, on whose head will the *pap* befall?"

Now-a-days *pap* is used mainly as a solace or comforting idea. When one individual causes grevious hurt or misery to another, the aggreived person may seek comfort and say that *pap* will come upon the other party.

A *pap* commited may be excused, if there were no bad intentions. If someone accidentally steps onto ants, killing them he may not consider it a *pap*. Of course, an ardent believer may reproach himself and make amends even if he, unconsciuosly or without intention, commits a *pap*. A person may not himself be fully responsible for a deed, that is *pap*, but he may be an agent or a part-instrument in the act of commitment. In either case, the person concerned bears the consequences of his deeds.

In fact *pun* and *pap* are relative to the culture of the group and the situation in which the individual is placed. Both *dharma* and *karma* are important. A story was related in a religious congregation about Saint Tulsidas who was once taken by another *sadhu* (holy man) to eat at a community kitchen set up in a *dharmshala*. Saint Tulsidas had no receptacle to accept the food and not wanting to refuse the charity, he took the food in his footwear. Now this story could have two meanings; one, that Saint Tulsidas was so great that he could do such a pollut-

ing thing; second the story could mean that the *karma* was not wrong as the situation so demanded it. A saint must accept alms when they are given to him. Similarly, killing a man is *pap* in one instance and in another, say the battlefield, it is not so.

Pun and *pap*, good deeds and evil deeds, have additive properties, and bad deeds can be atoned for by performing good deeds. Cumulative properties are attached to a person's deeds. The evaluation is ultimately made in the house of God and it is not clear as to what exact value is attached to a deed. If an individual wants to atone for his mistake, he normally consults the pundit who may prescribe the correct form of atonement.

The consequences of the deeds performed on the earth are not only for the cycle of rebirth but also for the treatment of the soul in Swarag or Narak, terms which roughly corresponds to heaven and hell respectively. The soul receives differential treatment in heaven or hell. Hell is a place for torture and physical pains while heaven is a place for eternal peace and calm, blissful happiness.

The beliefs regarding the exact nature of Swarag and Narak vary, though there are no two opinions about the fact, "As thou sowest, so shall they reap". Some believe that there is no separate place like heaven or hell but the soul is immediately reborn after death. Where and how one is born depends upon the *karma*. One is born into a good and prosperous household and into a high caste, if one has done good deeds,—or into a poor and lowly household if one has done bad deeds. If a person does very bad deeds then he is reborn not in human but in animal form.

It is believed that whatever one gives in charity in this life, is returned in the next life. Like if one give water to the thirsty, then one will get sufficient water to drink in his next birth. Charity is considered the highest form of accumulating *pun*. Stories are often related to children to teach them the importance of charity.

One story, which is very popular, goes like this. There was an old woman who was very mean and miserly. She had never given anyone anything in her life; only once she had given a small radish to a beggar. When she died, Yamaraj told her,

"You will certainly go to hell since you have been mean and niggardly all your life. But, since you gave away one radish, on the strength of that you may spend one or two days in heaven. But you will have to go to heaven on the strength of that one radish only." So the old woman caught hold of the leaves of the radish and started going up to heaven. On the way there were other souls who saw her flying and thought that if they catch hold of her, they too could be transported to heaven. Three men, one dog and one cat caught hold of her and started flying with her. When the old woman looked down and saw all these people hanging onto her, she thought, "Why should all these people go to heaven on the strength of the radish that I gave in charity?" In order to shake them off, she jerked her leg, the radish broke and they all fell headlong into hell. So Yamaraj appeared before her and told her, "See, the meanness of your nature itself would not allow you to go to heaven, though I had given you one chance. You belong by nature to hell and that is where you have ultimately landed."

Some people believe that one does not even have to take rebirth but that retribution for one's misdeeds are given here in the very same birth. Examples are often given of rich but miserly men who have suffered greatly in their death-beds because of their misdeeds. An informant gave the example of a very rich man who had disinherited one of his sons and thrown him out. The son developed T.B. and he and his family lived in great poverty, but the rich man had refused them any help even in the direst necessity. Even when his son succumbed to disease and poverty, he had refused to lift the dead body and help its cremation. Today the same rich man lay helpless and in great agony on his death-bed, with even his speech faculties gone. Most people attributed his misery to the harsh treatment meted out to his own son by him. Nobody went to help old man either.

It is said that when a person is about to die, his entire life becomes clear before his eyes and he himself knows the balance of good and evil that he has done. It is this balance sheet of *pun* and *pap* which a person carries with him to his next life. All else is left behind. The accounts of *pun* and *pap* are kept by Yamaraj (or Dharmaraj as he is called) and entries are made exactly in a credit-debit fashion, whereby an ultimate sum-total may be worked out for each individual.

It is, however, not necessary that only the deeds of one's previous life affect one's present life. The past deeds give a start, but ultimately, life is also shaped by the deeds one performs in this life as well. Past and present are both important. If one suffers but cannot attribute the suffering to any deed one has done in this life, then it is attributed to deeds done in past life. Similarly, if a person is known to be mean or bad, yet enjoys prosperity, it is attributed to good deeds he had done in his previous life. A person who is doing good in this life but yet not getting any rewards, can console himself that in his next birth he will be rewarded. This cyclical concept of deeds and rewards lends a passivity to the character of individuals who are not greatly bothered about immediate rewards or retributions.

The crux of being a Hindu, is to be a proper member of society, to live according to one's *dharma*, to do one's *karma*, to accumulate *pun*, to avoid *pap*. However, all this should be done without caring for the rewards, for rewards are not necessary to come.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HIERARCHY

Karma and *pap* and *pun* lead directly to hierarchy in society. Every soul is born carrying the weight of its *karma*, to reap the consequences of its past deeds. There is no question of equality in society, for man is borne high or low, rich or poor, according to the merit earned by him. To accommodate souls of varying degrees of virtue, society provides a readymade stratification in terms of high and low castes, and male and female. However, the very ideas of *dharma and karma* mitigate any sense of frustration that might accrue to any position. Moreover, the satisfaction of fulfilling one's *dharma* in any position, however lowly, itself gives a feeling of virtuousness. At every position one has a *dharma* and a good chance to gather *pun*. Even the lowliest *chamar* learns to take pride in his own work, his role in society and in the fact that he is performing his *dharma*.

Society is divided on the basis of *varna* which are hierarchially arranged in order of purity and pollution. Other sub-groups of society consequently follow the same order. The first of such sub-groups are the various local castes called *jatis*. Their hierarchial arrangement rests on their identification with *varnas*, but there are *jatis* whose *varna* identification is vague. The *jatis* within a *varna* often compete with each other for higher positions, and there are some who even attempt to cross *varna* boundaries into higher levels.

The vagueness of the situation with regard to hierarchial arrangement also pervades the field of interaction. Each caste tries to outdo another or dominate it. The claim to higher status is accompanied by a derrogatory attitude towards other castes and adoption of certain ritually higher ways of life for oneself. Such attempts at self-elevation may or may not find acceptance by other groups in society. Often caste groups put

forward conflicting claims to higher positions, especially if they belong to the same *varna*.

The hierarchy between the upper three *varnas*, though well defined in ritual terms, is diffuse in practice and does not conform to a strict hierarchial interpretation. Different castes stress their own importance. Thus, while the Brahmin stresses his link with God and the importance of his role as a mediator between Man and God, coupled with his belief in his own superior power to think or intelligence; a Kshatriya stresses his own lordship over other castes on the basis of his greater physical strength and capacity for violent action; and a *baniya* has pride in his association with money and its power. The fact is that he can buy the services of a Brahmin whenever he wants. The Kshatriya depends on him for loans of money and is often indebted to him.

The Shudras or the lowest *varna* were the ones who really suffered discrimination. In recent times, with government legislation and political leverage, in the cities at least, the Shudras have also started claiming equal status. The low castes do not take any talking to and are often quite verbal in their displeasure. The sharp tongue of the low-caste women are feared by many persons of the upper castes. Since the work that they do is of such a nature as to make them indispensable to the pollution-conscious Hindus, a good degree of tolerance is exhibited towards them.

Educated low castes have started taking on upper caste surnames, and if they couple it with an occupation that is caste-free, there is little to distinguish a low caste from an upper caste, at least on the streets and in public places.

For the higher castes the situation is more fluid. Even the highest born or the Brahmins, though scripturally assigned a place of honour in society, come under varied treatment. The interaction between the pundit and his patron family can be varied and interesting, especially in the light of the changes in religious orientation of individuals of the succeeding generations. While the elders may be anxious to talk to him and consult him, the youngsters may interfere and show their disbelief about what he says, although done subtly and indirectly but sometimes going to the extent of poking fun at him.

One way of doing this is to ask misleading questions about the past of a friend from the reading of hand. The pundit may be asked the number of children an unmarried friend has. Whatever answer the pundit gives, he is bound to be wrong because the person concerned does not have any. Or to ask the pundit about a person's success in a law-suit while the person has no law-suit pending.

When there was a congregation of eight planets in a straight line, the pundits predicted a great disaster, the end of the world, and many people rushed to organise *havans* and religious worship to ward off the coming disaster. There were some who scoffed at the idea. On the appointed day nothing happened. Both sides were quite pleased.

When the first American set foot on the moon, a sacred heavenly body, people taunted the pundit. The Americans had got to the sacred heavenly body and a man had set foot on it. This implied that the Americans had defiled or profaned the sacred body.

The response of the clergymen to the varied attack is of two kinds. One is of passive resistance and the other, a more active resistance. Passive resistance takes the form of saying that we are living in *Kalyug*, *pap* is everywhere, the world has become a bad place, most people are *papi*. An active resistance is shown when a pundit may defend the horoscope but admit that the calculations on the basis of which it was prepared had been done wrongly; or that the time of birth given on the basis of which a horoscope was prepared, may have been given or noted wrongly, for even a few seconds' difference in the time of birth can make a difference as to the positions of the planetary movements in the different *grihas* or spaces.

Once a rich businessman had two daughters; when his wife was expecting a third time, he consulted a pundit who, after much consultation with his *jantris* (horoscope guides), predicted that the new born will be a boy. He prescribed certain rituals which were dutifully carried out and by which the pundit benefited monetarily in no mean measure. When the baby arrived, it was a premature birth and to add to the depression, it was a girl. The pundit was called to explain, which he did. He said, "If the child had not been premature (i.e. it had been born under the right star signs) it would have been a boy".

When people find that a pundit is suggesting an inconvenient time for beginning a venture they may induce him (sometimes with large payments) to look harder and find a more conveniently-placed auspicious time, or they may consult another pundit. The flexibility that the pundit shows in this regard, adds to the agonosticism of the lay.

The Kshatriya is often viewed as a usurper misusing his power not just to accumulate property, but to get a vicarious pleasure in seeing others in a sorry plight. Even a dead Kshatriya's ghost is dangerous. He enjoys bullying others. He will not stop to turn a highway-man. Lies are his stock in trade in achieving his nefarious designs.

The *baniya* is miserly to the extent of being niggardly. He will give up his skin but not part with a penny. He accumulates money through various trade malpractices. Shortweighing, short-changing, falsifying accounts, adulteration and lying are part and parcel of his *modus vivendi*.

The hierarchy of the caste groups is carried on into the *gotras*. Each caste group is divided into *gotras* for the purpose of marriage. Even within these, there is a claim for higher and lower status, depending upon the ancestor from whom the *gotra* claims descent and the numerical strength of the members of the *gotra*.

Considerations of superiority and inferiority of *gotra* status affects marriage. Each family wants to preserve the superiority of its *gotra*. Marriage itself creates a situation of hierarchy. No matter what the status of the family at the time of marriage, the bride-givers are always inferior to the bride-receivers. That is, the family of the woman going out in marriage is ritually and socially inferior to the family of the bridegroom. This derives from the inherent hierarchy of the sexes (man above woman) man—pure, woman—impure). A man, especially a husband, is always superior to his wife. This superiority and inferiority of status pertains to the respective families also.

In social interaction this finds expression in many ways. All members of the bride's family show deference and respect to all members of the bridegroom's family, irrespective of actual age and status. Even the children are shown special consideration. At the time of marriage, the members of the bride's party

eat after the groom's party has eaten. Every wish of the groom's party is attended to.

Even after marriage, the groom's family have a right to visit and eat at the bride's place but no adult member of the bride's family, especially parents and others of the parental generation will not even take water at the groom's house. Similarly, all gifts move uni-directionally from the bride's house to the groom's house.

The hierarchy is carried down from the levels of society right down to the family where the adults hold higher status than the children and men are higher than the women. By these principles, the oldest male member in the family is automatically the ritual and social head, over all other members. His position is equivalent to the king in a kingdom. The head of the family may, if he wishes, exercise an autocratic and even despotic rule, controlling every movement of other members of the family.

Even a person's own body is hierarchially arranged. The head is the ritually highest point and the feet the lowest. Similarly, the right hand is superior to the left. If respect is to be showed to anything, it is touched to the head. Touching anything with one's feet amounts to desecration or gross disrespect. The highest respect to be showed another person is by placing one's head at the other person's feet or touching his feet with one's hands and taking the hand to one's head. This, called *pranam*, is done before deities, holy men, *gurus*, teachers and such persons who are one's social superiors; a wife to husband, son to father, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law.

The right hand is used for all acts that are pure, such as eating, giving and receiving money, making religious offerings. The left hand is preserved for ritually impure acts including ablution after defeacation. A naturally left-handed person has to undergo social discrimination. His eating and writing with the left hand that is ritually impure, brings social approbation.

A man born in a superior position, high caste, rich family or powerful status is automatically higher than others who are born in more lowly positions. Who can be more highly born than the ruler himself? The status difference between the ruler and ruled is irrevocable, to be universally accepted and the wishes and whims of the ruler tolerated without question. The ruler is enjoying the fruits of his own *karma* and the ruled are

in a lower position by virtue of their lesser *karma*. However, complete despotism by the ruler is controlled by the dictates of his own *dharma* which advises sacrifice, charity and a fair rule.

The same principle extends to difference between the rich and poor. The rich are not to be resented or envied by the poor. A man is rich because he deserves to be so, by past deeds or present. However the poor have every right to ask for alms to better their own lot in this world and of the giver in the next. Most rich people consider it their religious duty to give to the poor in order to add to their own merit. A Hindu gives not so much out of consideration for the receiver but to add to his own ritual superiority as a giver.

CHAPTER NINE

INEQUALITY

The system of hierarchy can be maintained by a strong authority, more so in the context of a religion that demands the suppression of an individual's tastes, wants and desires. Children are brought up to accept an almost despotic authority of the parents. Women come under the authority of men. It is said that a woman is under the authority of her father in childhood, her husband in adult life and her sons in old age. Males come under the authority of the head of the family. The heads of families come under the caste panchayats. Authority pervades the entire life.

The line of demarcation between use of legitimate authority and exploitation, and its abuse between hierarchy and inequality is very thin. In fact, if the system has to be characterised, it can be done as one of abuse of authority. The low castes are exploited by the high castes, the women by the men, and the children by their parents.

CASTE PANCHAYATS

Caste panchayats are of lesser importance today. At one time they were powerful bodies with strong sanctions at their disposal. The elders who composed these bodies were unflinching in meting out punishment. The sanctions included, fines, social boycott and excommunication. Their power was so great that in case of excommunication, a man had to move out from the area with his wife and children. The kin of the excommunicated also stopped talking to the person.

Their decisions were by consensus rather than by democratic vote and the tyranny of consensus is to be felt, to be belived. The rich man may be able to face things but for the poor, the majority of whom were from the low castes, life must be

intolerable. To add to their authority, the elders make the laws themselves.

LOW CASTES

The lowliest castes of the Shudras, considered untouchables, are the ones who actually suffer ostracism. Their labour does not fetch commensurate rewards. Till recently untouchables were not allowed to enter temples. Most people observed pollution from the touch of the *chamar* (leather worker), *bhangi* (scavenger) and *dhobi* (washerman). In very few homes will an untouchable, asking for water, be given water to drink in a glass. They have to drink water in their cupped hand, keeping reasonable distance from the laddle from which it is being poured. The washerman bringing clothes to the house is rarely allowed to enter inside. Even when they are allowed, they have to take off their shoes outside and squat on the ground. A touch from the scavenger may be considered polluting by many. In many houses the *bhangi* is not allowed to enter the courtyard of the house. He cannot open the tap and fill a bucket of water. There is hardly any higher caste family that would allow an untouchable to share a meal with them or have them sit with them.

With strict legal strictures, discrimination against the untouchables in public places like the temples and restaurants are diminishing, but in individual homes taboos about pollution from untouchables are still maintained to a large extent. In social interaction, the service castes assert themselves, fully realizing the indispensable nature of their work.

Though untouchables may be allowed to enter temples and offer worship, yet members of the twice-born castes are on the controlling bodies. More often, harijans or low castes have their own temples. This is partly due to the difficulty of caste identification in the anonymical conditions of city life, but in the most part of the country, it is because state laws give the harijans a right to enter temples. About 15 years ago any such attempt might prove futile. High caste people who were around would drive off a low caste intruder once he was indentified as such.

WOMEN

Sex is the second major basis of stratification. A woman by birth is considered unequal to man and this is exhibited in the process of socialization and in all social relationships existing in society. A woman is brought up for the purpose of being an ideal wife and, secondarily, a mother. The entire bringing up of a girl is concentrated on this aspect of her personality. The emphasis is on teaching them to suppress all individual desires and inclinations.

Girls are taught to have patience, to speak less, speak softly and even to laugh with restraint; never to disobey or talk back to an elder. They have to learn to control even hunger and taste for good food. A girl is taught always to cater to the taste of elder members, especially males, in the family while preparing food. Right from childhood there is marked discrepancy between brothers and sisters in eating. Whenever there is any choice item to be distributed, boys are given larger and better shares, the girls getting something if there is anything leftover and usually in lesser quantities. Girls are also not expected ever to make any complaints regarding inequality but to consider it as a rightful male prerogative.

Later, in married life, a woman similarly gives better and good food to her husband, elder male members and sons, and eats only if there is anything leftover. It is not considered a matter of great concern for a woman to even go to bed hungry. Women are expected to rise early and sleep late, for when she will be a daughter-in-law she will have to get up before anyone has stirred from their sleep and go to bed after everyone is sleep.

Girls are also taught more about religion. The reading of the Gita and Ramayana as well as a knowledge of the various calendrical rituals is an essential part of their learning process. Girls are made to keep fasts from the tender age of five or six. In fact, a certain series of fastshave to be completed before a girl reaches puberty. Right from babyhood little girls are not expected to keep their arms 'bare' but to wear glass bangles; even ear rings, anklets, necklaces and girdles are considered essential parts of a girl/woman's wear. However, girls are not encouraged

to be fashionable or dress well. They should never attract the attention of outsiders.

Girls usually visit the temple and pray for a husband who is good and sympathetic and a house in which she will not face much conflict. Girls fast on Mondays and especially on Mahashivratri day for a good husband.

Her coming marriage and the uncertainties therein, especially the new pattern of authority that she will be subjected to, is a source of mental worry. In this she is resigned to God and her parents who will make the choice. Any attachment to a boy of her liking is considered immoral.

A married woman must wear *sindoor* (vermillion powder) in the parting of her hair, put on a *bindi* on her forehead and wear glass bangles red or green in colour or gold ones. She must also put on jewellery on her ears, neck, toes and ankles. High caste women wear gold jewellery while low caste women wear silver jewellery. Women from the lower (Shudra) castes are not supposed to wear particular articles of jewellery like the nose ring.

Normally, a married woman is not encouraged to dress very well or be fashion-conscious. The reason is that once a woman is married, she should not appear attractive to men other than her husband. Although many qualities are looked for in a girl before she is chosen for marriage, after marriage and after the first flush of honeymoon is over, husbands generally choose to ignore their wives. In a joint family a husband may not even speak to his wife in presence of other household members. There is no show of affection between husband and wife. Husbands are expected to treat their wives with contempt. It is only with age and grown up children that a certain bond of affection may form between husband and wife.

In later life a woman is supposed to be completely united with her husband. The husband and wife are supposed to be spiritually united after death and even in successive births.

Inspite of all the sacrifices that a woman makes during her lifetime, she gets little respect. The character of a woman is often depicted, as one who is stubborn, given to telling lies, fickle, stupid, talkative, greedy, brash, cruel and impure. In social interaction with women, these characteristics are often taken as yardsticks to deal with them. Sayings such as these

persons deserve the stick (punishment): a Shudra, a woman and a child" only serve to illustrate this point.

There are interesting stories to depict the slyness of women. One of them goes like this. Once Kabirdas asked his wife to show him the true character of a woman about which he had heard so much. His wife begged him not to force her to reveal such a secret. But he insisted. His wife then told him to go out of the house and come back after ten minutes. In the meantime, some *sadhus* came and asked about Kabirdas. His wife told them that Kabirdas has suddenly become mad, whenever he sees *sadhus* he runs after them with a rope and ties them up. The *sadhus*, on hearing this, quickly made an exit.

Kabirdas came back, to see some *sadhus* hurrying away. He asked his wife as to what she had given them as alm. His wife told him that they were asking for a thick length of rope lying in the corner but she did not give it to them. At this Kabirdas quickly picked up the rope and ran after the sadhus, crying "Swamiji", "Swamiji". When the *sadhus* looked back and saw Kabirdas running after them, it confirmed what his wife had said and they ran faster than ever. Try as he might, Kabirdas could not catch up with them and he came back home puzzled and exhausted.

When he reached home he found his wife laughing. She asked him, "Now, have you seen the true character of a woman?" Kabirdas, in bewilderment, asked her to explain. She then told him the whole story, adding in the end that this was the slyness of the woman he wanted to see.

A woman is considered impure because of her physical conditions as well. A woman in her menstruation is very impure and is secluded from all interaction and not allowed to enter the kitchen or touch money. She must sit and eat separately from everyone. A husband must also have nothing to do with a wife in her menstruation.

Birth of a child also involves a state of pollution. All the clothes and bedding used at the time of birth are either given away to a low caste person or to the *dhobi* for washing. For forty days after childbirth, a woman is not allowed to enter the kitchen or do any household work.

A woman, though considered sly and cunning in an animal-like way, is not credited with much wisdom and capacity for

learning. Women are not allowed to handle family wealth and property and do not share in inheritence. She does not come to own any property, apart from what ornaments her father had given her at the time of her marriage or what her husband has bought for her or the relatives have given to her as a present. The last named is mostly regarded as a family investment and the husband can take it away from her as and when required by the exigencies arising in his economic enterprises. The jewellery or even dowry items given to a woman by her father are regarded as *stree-dhan* (woman's wealth) and the husband or his family have no legal rights over it. In actual practice, there is little that a woman can do against the will of her husband, and whatever she has belongs to him.

Till recent times, woman of even the high castes and upper classes were rarely educated. A woman was not expected to know much about the outside world. Within the house, the woman's quarters were separate and at the back of the house, while the men spent most of their time in the front part of the house which included the sitting room for receiving visitors. Thus women were cut off from whosoever was coming in and going out of the house unless the person came especially to meet them.

A woman is, under no conditions, supposed to know more or be wiser than her husband. Even if she has native intelligence, she is socialized to suppress rather than develop it.

CHILDREN

Children, like women, are also subjected to domination by adults. A child is expected to be like clay in the hands of adults and to obey blindly. Children of service castes are rarely, if ever, sent to school but, instead, into the trade of their parents at a very early age. Putting children to labour is a common practice. Childhood is a time to work and obey, allowing for little play. Even very small children, if not working, are allotted duties around the house which include running errands and looking after smaller children.

Upper caste children fare somewhat better because they are sent to school and have time allotted for study. But in all sections of society little freedom is allowed to children to get away

from home and family and do things on their own. They have to constantly live under the shadow of adults. Independent decision-making is not encouraged and authoritarian rule by adults extends to all spheres of a child's activity including food, friends and play.

Adults specially keep an eye on the company the child keeps. Factors such as caste and family are important in deciding a child's playmates. The outings of the child are usually limited to visit to the temple with the father or mother or both, and visit to the houses of kin-folk; where only it is petted and played with. It is usually the mother who takes the child to the temple where he or she imitates her and learns to bow or offer coins before the idol.

Sexual identification of the child starts from the very infancy since boys are preferred to girls, but it is from about the age of three and four that the identity becomes more marked.

The tone that the father uses towards the child is quite harsh and may include the use of abusive language. At around the age of five, the child is old enough to pass things around the house. The girls begin to identify with the kitchen by hanging around, playing with dough. At this age the boys and girls begin to play with children of neighbours. Children are made to pay prompt attention to the calling of elders. Orders to carry messages and pass things around the house, often interferes with their play.

This is also the time when they imitate older children and start asking for tit-bits, sweet and soury items. Children make frequent demands on their parents for these, but all too often they are refused. Children often throw tantrums to get them and sometimes they succeed. When the mother or father refuses to indulge the child, he or she may shout at the child so hard as to freeze him in his feet. Aggressive behaviour of the child is put down sternly. The mother or father may beat the child as and when the child is disobedient.

The autocratic rule by adults extends right upto youth and even marriage. In the last, a young man or woman is allowed no freedom of choice. Marriage is a matter of preservation of caste and lineage and not to do with anything individualistic, values or love. It is very important that young men and women marry according to normative rules, or the carefully preserved

social hierarchy would crumble. To maintain social inequality, it is important for marriages to take place between set boundaries. Marriage out of love is abhorrent. Love is abhorrent. The strict control that parents impose upon their offspring is largely directed towards this end. Children are not encouraged to play with those of the opposite sex, an injunction which becomes a taboo as they grow older. Intermingling between unmarried youth of the post-puberty age is subject to severe parental discouragement and even punishment.

CHAPTER TEN

ALTRUISM *vs* SELFISHNESS

Man is an animal: even more of an animal than the animals are. He is ridden by intense desire and passions, the most overriding ones being for the possession of things and the satisfaction of the senses, the search for *maya*. His mind is preoccupied with the desire for gratification of wants such as for property, power and prestige. In short, man has an ego. Work, family, and recreation involve him so completely that to focus attention on gods can at best be a part-time affair. The layman is tied up in a cycle of events to satisfy material wants and this is called *maya*. It is a cycle of events because the sensual drives can never be fully satisfied. Satisfaction at one stage leads to further desires. Such is the nature of the human psyche. Whether it is the taste for good food, like meats; the desire for beauty, like woman; attachment to sweet sounds, like musical rhythm; desire for sweet smells, like perfumes; the sensuousness of touch, like sex, there is no complete satisfaction of any human drive.

In the same vein, man's egoistic demands of property, power and, prestige can never be fully realized. Man's lust, greed and anger, lead him to domination, consumation and destruction. His ego and his senses must be given a direction. These propensities must be sublimated, if not completely eliminated. If it be otherwise, there will be disorder and anarchy and life on the earth itself, will be endangered.

Meditation is the best means to help man to control his material quests. When this meditation takes the form of a *tapasya* or penance, where man eats little or just lives on air or not even that, doing nothing else, but mentally occupied by the thoughts of divinity, the sublimation is complete.

Most of the men can hardly achieve the rigid control of mind sufficient to do *tapasya*. Their attention of this spiritual side of life is limited to periodic worship, *puja* and perfor-

mance of ritual. In these, the senses find fulfilment but in a direction which takes them away from satisfaction in a particularly material way, towards a spiritual dimension.

The foods presented before god and partaken with him are sweet meats to satisfy the palate but rarely the tastiest of all foods, meat. The forms of the gods and their clothes are beautiful, but the gods are made of stone and do not possess the warmth of real men and women. Lovely, fragrant flowers are offered to the gods, and incense is burnt. Songs are sung to the gods in a robust rythm and often adapted to pop music. The instruments used to keep time are percussion instruments except the harmonium; a wind instrument. Thus, religion sublimates the senses. It combines sensuality with spirituality.

Religion gives a direction to man's quest for power, prestige and property, the instruments that give him a high place in society. The sole medium in which these drives are expressed is money or wealth. Religion obliges a man of any standing to give in charity, according to his capacity to give, thereby giving another direction to use of his money.

Man suffers many privations in the name of divinity. However, he still wants to seek it for himself because it is depicted in such attractive terms and minus the many drawbacks that are associated with the earthly search for the satisfaction of drives. If a person is successful today, he may be a pauper tomorrow. Man would like best of all to achieve permanency of divine status. Divinity is still an attractive proposition. It is bathed, clothed, fed and honoured. Its powers are great. The wants of divinity are minimal. They fall outside the domain of the wants and desires pursued by man. Divinity has freedom to do anything, to the point of being capricious. A divine status is all that a person could ask for to reach the ultimate freedom from the shackles of mundanity. It enjoins that man subdue his efforts to pursue *maya* and spend time for religion to escape the misery of rise and fall.

The religious environment is ideally geared for focussing the attention of men. There are gods at home, at the place of work and in temples. The gods are anthropomorphic beings on whom he can easily concentrate his mind. The sublimation of the senses, the suppression of wants and the base instinct of selfishness create in the mind of man, a situation where further

pain like the loss of a loved one, disease, poverty, misery all become bearable.

The religious system helps to subdue pain and pleasure by raising them above the level of the individual to a plane where they are always shared. It is said that a man looks foolish if he laughs alone or cries alone. Disease and death are at every doorstep. The ability to bear pain itself is a great thing; living, as people do in a very precarious, natural environment.

Solace can further be derived by looking at those who suffer the wrath of the gods or bear the cross of their *karma*. A man has only to look below him to see that he is in a much vaulted position.

Certain individual are known as *mangali*, a condition derived from their being born under a particular planetary configuration. The *mangali* must perforce marry another one who is similarly a *mangali*. The number of such persons is few and the search for a suitable bride or groom is a painful process. If *a mangali* marries a non *mangali*, either of the spouses suffers the fate of dying soon after the marriage. Now, how much lucky are the ones that are not born under the *mangali* signs? Thus, the misery of a few, provides consolation for many others not similarly handicapped.

The Hindu with his strict religious and social upbringing, leading to suppressed tastes and desires, is undoubtedly an emotional person. He is continuosly suffering the pains of the suppression going on within him. Even the slightest provocation or hurt from any quarter, even accidently befalling him, sets his mind working. Why is this thing happening to me. The problem has basically touched what is already a soft spot. This hypersensivity to events leads to greater and greater dependence on divinity. But the gods do not always deliver the goods either. They too are capricious and so is man's fate. When man prays for rain, the gods may or may not send rain. When man prays that his children be spared from small pox, the mother goddess may or may not condescend. *Karma* is a safety valve too.

In his search for a god that is not deaf or blind, he may change his favourite god or he may choose an empty alcove in a wall or a stone jutting out from a well as his object of worship. An obsure stone may not be high divinity but at least the rights are exclusive. The individual proprietorship gives rise to

a one-to-one situation where contact between man and god becomes quite personalized. This supports the prolific divinity that dots the Hindu environment. In his relationship to god, each man, at a certain stage, finds himself both alone and helpless. This drives him to a more personalized gods and individual rituals or magic.

The *varnas*, the castes, the Panchayats, the joint family were institutions designed for an altruistic life where everyone, following the nature of divinity, should attempt to give more than they receive. Aitruism is supposed to extend to permitting the use of one's property to whom it does not belong, like women and children, and to destitutes, and the public via charity.

But, clearly, where altruism is actually practiced, the social and psychological costs which have to be paid by the receiver, however, can be enormous. The person who receives materially has to pay back in terms ofservitude and debasement of personality like the lower castes with respect to the upper castes, the ruled with respect to the ruler, women to men, and children to adults. This, again, is in line with principles of divinity. A person worships divinity, accepts a much lower status and as a consequence of the lower status and recognition of what is being received, gives up his time in prayers, and in God's name sublimates his physical wants and gives his material possessions in religious charity.

Like the gods who take material offerings and behave capriciously, those that are in high positions also do the same. Those who are lucky to be born and bred in a privileged position, often turn around and extract from the under-privileged ones, the dues that are their rights by virtue of their exalted position.

In actual practice, dominance does not stop at the sanctioned borders of social and psychological levels but goes further into material goods. In fact, the one who is dominant and powerful often exploits the submissive and the weak for his own selfish gains of goods and property. In a community where land is plenty and the other material wants are few, the altruistic system can work, but where accumulation of property is not important but there is scarcity of resources even for consumption, there is a complete breakdown. It is very easy to desire

for satisfaction of the senses to get the better of spirituality.

Hinduism has no place for altruism where it concerns the exercise of power; in granting freedom, to have alternate choices; to have independence in the forms of control over social investment. Society, and the moral order and its sanctions, force the individual to invest in the security of pre-existing kin ties, rather than in security of goods.

Selfishness in the exercise of power can be moderated by decision-making in a democratic fashion. Selfishness in prescribing unchanging norms, backed by the elders sitting in collectivity, can be replaced by a number of alternate choices available to the individual. Selfishness is in the control of the individual investment in security ties in the prescribed way where a woman is to vest her security in her brother, and a man to invest his security in his joint family and caste, and for the caste to invest in the strength of its collectivity and its relations to other castes. Strong emotional bonds tie an individual in each of these spheres of life. An alternate investment of security in material goods would free him from life-long psychological and social bondage with pre-existing kin and family. A man could thus be emotion free to attach himself according to his invidualistic drives rather than pre-existing social bonds.

The razor's edge dividing altruism from selfishness thus determines man's fate in society. Unfortunately for him, more often than not, man crosses the boundary into exploitation and dominance. Divinity misfired, but it is said the goddess turned malevolent.

GLOSSARY

Aarti or arti or arta — A ritual act in which a large round plate or tray usually made of bronze or silver containing ritual items is held in both hands and moved in a circular fashion in front of a revered idol or person.

Abhishek — Annointment.

Acharya — Ideally behaved.

Amrit — Elixir of life

Anghithi — The traditional domestic health.

Angochha — A long cloth; measuring a yeard by half a yard, of light cotton; often used as a towel and carried on the shoulder.

Anna — An earlier Indian coinage when there were 16 annas in Rupee one.

Ardh — Half.

Ardhangani — Half part of the body or household; is used for a wife.

Asadh — A Hindu month falling around June-July.

Asana — A mat. The word is also used for the various postures assumed in exercise.

Ashram — The house of a sage.

Ashtami — The eighth day.

Ashudha — Impure.

Ashwamedh — A Yajna performed by kings to establish their supermacy over other kings.

Ashwin — A Hindu month falling around September-October.

Atman — Soul.

Baina — Sprinkling of water from the cupped hand done a circular fashion over ritual items.

Bhadrapad — A Hindu month falling around August-September.

Bhakti — Total devotion without any other encumberances entering the mind.

Bhangi — A menial caste whose occupational specialization is to clean streets, and remove night soil. They also raise pigs.

Bhoot — Ghost.

Bidi — A cigarette made from a leaf of the tendu tree.

Bindi — A mark put by Hindu women on the forehead.

Brahmachari — A person who devotes his time to learning. More especially a person who has-abstained from sex all his life.

Bundi — A sweet preparation made of the flour of bengal gram and sugar syrup.

Burfee — Milk cake.

Chait — A Hindu month falling around March-April.

Chakra — Any round form.

Chakravyuha — A battle formation whose details are not known today.

Chana Dal — Split beans of bengal gram.

Chandan — Sandalwood paste made by grinding sandalwood on a stone using a little water.

Chandrma — Moon

Chapati — Unleavened bread, like pan cakes.

Charnamrit — A mixture of milk, sugar, curds and tulsi.
Chauth or Chaturthi — Fourth day.
Chhatti or Sasthi — The sixth day.
Chholia — Fresh (green) grams.
Chhoti — Small (feminine)
Chunni — A long cloth, of light material; about 2 yeards long and 1 yard wide; used by women to cover their shoulders and head.
Dakshina — Charity given usually to a holy man.
Damroo — A rattle drum or a small double headed drum with pellets attached to strings held in the hand at the centre. When the drum is put in oscilating movement, the pellets beat on the membrane of the drum.
Dan — A gift given without expectations of return.
Dandavat — A crouching or low position of the human body.
Dashmi — The tenth day.
Devi — A female goddess; not but connected to the Hindu Trinity.
Devrani — Husband's younger brother's wife.
Devta — A male god, but not connected to the Hindu Trinity.
Dharmashala — Rest house for the public.
Dhoop — A round black stick of the size of a finger made of aromatic substances. The smoke of the dhoop is thick and sweet smelling.
Dhoti — A long cloth tied around the waist.

Diya — A small earthen container with a small snout for resting a wick of cotton.
Dooj — The second day.
Dwaparyug — The third age in the cosmic cycle.
Ekadshi — The eleventh day.
Gada — A club or mace used as a weapon.
Gandharva — A class of super-human beings embodying the fine arts.
Gau — Probably it is a rhodent like porcupine.
Ghar — House or household.
Ghee — Clarified butter.
Gopies — Milk-maids.
Gotra — Clan—like division of a caste.
Griha — Heavenly bodies, affecting profoundly, life on earth.
Gulgale — Made from lentil flour and salted, or sweetened.
Gur — A lump of brown sugar or jaggery.
Guru — Teacher.
Halahal — A poison that was obtained by the Churning of the oceans.
Halwa — A sweet preparation of flour of bengal gram or semolina which is cooked with some ghee and sugar syrup is added.
Havan — Worship of fire perfomred by chanting mantras and making offerings to the fire.
Hookah — Hubble-bubble.
Imarti — A hard toffee made from the flour of bengal gram.

Jagran — Night long vigil, (involving worship) usually for a mother goddess.

Jai — Praise.

Jaith — A Hindu month falling around May-June.

Janeu — A sacred thread worn across the shoulder by the twice-born castes.

Jantris — Practical guides to the movements of the heavenly bodies in space.

Jethani — Husband's elder brothers wife.

Jiji — A term of address for a sister.

Joothan — Contaminated by Saliva.

Kachori — A food item that is saucer shaped made from wheat flour and stuffed with spices.

Kalyug — The age of evil. This fourth age in the cycle of the cosmos.

Karmandal — A gourd container used by holy personage to carry water.

Kartik — A Hindu month falling around October-November.

Khaja — A sweet made from flour, sugar and sesame seeds.

Kheer — A sweet-dish of rice boiled in sugared milk.

Ki — Of.

Kismat — A predetermined fate.

Labham — Profit.

Laddu — Sweet made of (bundi) bengal gram flour.

Lila — Enactment or play.

Lota — A small round metal container with a neck near the opening

Magh — A Hindu month falling around January-February.

Mahatma — Great soul.

Makhane — A variety of lotus seeds.

Mala — Garland.

Mama — Mother's brother.

Mandali — A group of people collected together to pursue certain ends.

Mani — A precious stone.

Mantras — Verbal formulations chanted to achieve certain ends.

Margashirsh — A Hindu month falling around November-December.

Mata — A mother. The term is often used for goddesses.

Matthi — Salted snacks item made from wheat flour.

Maya — The world as a material phenomena. It is considered an illusion, a creation of the gods.

Mela — A fair.

Moksha — Liberation from the cycle of birth and death when the soul joins gods.

Moong dal — A variety of (red) lentil.

Mouli — A white, yellow, red coloured cotton thread.

Mridang — A double membrane drum.

Muni — A sage of very high standing.

Namaskar — A Hindu form of greeting done by folding the hands.

Nanad — Husband's sister.

Naumi or Navmi — The ninth day.

Neech — Low down or lower.

Neelkanth	A name of Shiva meaning the one with the blue throat.
Neorate or Navratre	Nine nights.
Niyam	Order, rule, regularity.
Padmasan	The lotus position.
Pan	Leaf of the betal tree
Panchami	The fifth day.
Papi	A sinner, one who has done pap.
Patal Lok	Underworld.
Patashe	A sweet, the size of a large button made by baking sugar.
Peepal	The botanical name of the tree is *ficus religiosa.*
Phagun	A Hindu month falling around February-March.
Phool	Flowers.
Piaos	A place where drinking water is available for the public.
Pinda	Round lumps of rice or other grains or lentils. The items are often half cooked.
Pisach	Evil spirit.
Pitara	A large container of wood or leaves.
Posh	A Hindu month falling around December-January.
Pranam	A verbal expression or body movement showing great respect. Usually includes the lowering of the head and folding of the hands or touching the feet of the person or object of reverence.
Prasad	Offerings made to the gods which are then partaken by the votaries.
Pua	A preparation of wheat flour and sugar fried in oil.
Puja	Prayers, offerings and ringing

	of the bell done as part of worships of gods.
Pujari	A Brahmin who officiates as the caretaker of a deity.
Puree	Saucer sized pan cakes of wheat dough made by deep frying.
Purnamashi	The night of the full moon.
Purohit	A Brahmin who maintains jajmani relations.
Raja	King or ruler.
Rakhi	A thread which is tied around the right wrist of a man by one who is seeking protection from him.
Rakshasa	A demon.
Ratti	A measure of weight used in India. Ten ratti are approximately equal to one gram.
Rishi	Sage.
Roli	A mixture of turmeric and lime of red colour.
Rotis	Unleavened bread, thicker than pan cakes.
Rudraksha	Precious beads.
Sachha	Truthful.
Samadhi	A State of self control in which a person controls his own soul, and its release from the body.
Samagri	A mixture of aromatic substances.
Sanatan	Eternal.
Sankat-motchan	Dispeller of troubles.
Satya	True.
Satyug	The first age in the cosmic cycle. The age of truth.
Seers	An earlier Indian measure of weight; one seer is a little less

than one kilogram.

Shakti	Power.
Shamiana	Large Tents.
Shrawana	A Hindu month falling around July-August.
Shubh	Auspicious.
Shudha	Pure.
Sindoor	Vermillion powder.
Sri Chakram	An auspicious circular body.
Streedhan	A woman's wealth.
Sucha	Not contaminated by saliva.
Sudarshan	Beautiful. It refers to Vishnu.
Suhaag	Husband.
Sukh	Peace and prosperity.
Supari	Nut of a palm tree.
Surya	Sun.
Swayambar	An ancient Hindu form of marriage wherein the prospective suitors were lined up and the woman chose her husband by garlanding the man of her choice.
Swayambhu	An object that grows by itself.
Tapasya	Penance.
Tesu	Flowers of the flame of the forest tree. They are light orange in colour and when soaked over night in water, they colour the water a bright orange.
Teej	The third day.
Thali	A large round metal plate or tray used for eating or in ceremonials.
Til	Sesame seeds.
Tithi	A 'day' calculated from the movement of the moon.
Tretayuga	The second age in the cosmic cycle.
Trishul	A trident.

Tulsi	Basil plant or leaves of a basil plant.
Vahana	Transport.
Vaisakh	A Hindu month falling around April-May.
Veena	A stringed musical instrument like a sitar.
Vyjanthimala	Garland of flowers around the neck of Vishnu.
Yajna	Worship of the fire; it may also involve a sacrifice or others rituals.
Yogi	A man who has complete control over his body and mind.
Yojanas	A measure of distance. One yojan is equal to 4 'kosas' and one 'kosa' is equal to two miles.
Yoni	Vagina or womb.
Yug (a)	A period of time measuring the process of change in the universe.
Yuvraj	Crown prince.

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